



### Solidarity

**Film Summary:** In 1983, Operation Solidarity and the Solidarity Coalition came together in response to a series of proposed bills by the Social Credit government to stage the largest protest in the province's history.

**Curriculum Application:**  
Political Studies 12  
Social Justice 12

**The Essential Question:** What are the ways in which Canadian citizens can influence their government? How can ordinary people affect positive change in a democratic society?

### Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Focus questions for the vignette provide a short lesson option. (15 minutes)
2. A more detailed lesson reviewing the video and provided reading material allows for a greater understanding of the events of the Solidarity movement in 1983. This work can be completed individually or in small groups.
3. The activity "Resolve the problem without a union" provides the opportunity to understand the reasoning behind collective bargaining rights. This is a small group activity.

### Learning Standards

1. The lesson develops an understanding of the 3 big ideas of the course.
  - Understanding how political decisions are made is critical to being an informed and engaged citizen.
  - Political institutions and ideology shape both the exercise of power and the nature of political outcomes.
  - Decision making in a democratic system of government is influenced by the distribution of political and social power.
2. The lesson also embeds the Big 5 Historical Inquiry concepts into the lesson materials: **significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, perspective and ethical judgment**

### Materials and Resources Provided

- [“Solidarity” Episode 3- Working People- A history of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- Appendix 1: Teaching Strategy
- Appendix 2: Solidarity Backgrounder
- Appendix 3: Unionizing at Starbucks
- Lesson Activity 1: Solidarity Worksheet
- Lesson Activity 2: Digital Museums of Canada
- Lesson Activity 3: Resolve the Problem without a Union

### Additional Suggested Materials

- [Common Cause- a 1984 film examining the events of Operation Solidarity](#)
- [VIU Media Studies. BC’s 1983 Solidarity Movement 30 Years On-Something for the Left to Celebrate or best forgotten?](#)
- [Solidarity: The Largest Political Protest in British Columbia’s History \(communitystories.ca\)](#)
- [On the Line: A History of the British Columbia Labour Movement-Chapter 18 \(available through your library @knowbc.com\)](#)
- [Art Kube - Working People Built BC \(labourheritagecentre.ca\)](#)

### Vignette Questions

1. What events prompted the origins of the solidarity movement in the summer of 1983?
2. Which 3 main groups joined together in the summer of 1983 that would become known as the Solidarity movement?
3. Three major protests took place in the summer and fall of 1983 against the Social Credit government’s stripping of legislation; where did these protests take place?
4. What “fear” prompted the provincial government to negotiate with the solidarity movement?
5. Which labour leader negotiated a settlement with the provincial government?
6. Which groups were not satisfied with the settlement? Explain

### Lesson Activities

1. The lesson materials are designed to be taught as part of the study of labour relations and social justice within the history of the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The materials can be incorporated into Social Studies Exploration, Social Justice 12, or Political Studies 12.
2. Appendix 1 provides a detailed overview of suggested strategies for teaching the materials of this lesson.
3. Lesson materials can be covered in variety of ways depending on the time available in your course. A short lesson option would cover a portion of the class, the extended version; resolve a problem without a union would take a normal class period to complete. An extension reading for further understanding the role of workers’ rights is found in Appendix 3 Unionizing at Starbucks with sample questions to prompt student discussion.
4. The 2-video links provided in “Additional Suggested Materials” could be used to compare and contrast how historical events are covered and perceived over time.
5. Explore the Digital Museums of Canada’s exhibit on Solidarity: The Largest Political Protest in British Columbia’s History and assign the task in Lesson Activity 2.

bctf/ufcw1518

Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by John Decaire and Wayne Axford

## Appendix 1: Teaching Strategy

## Lesson: Solidarity

### Introduction

This lesson is intended to be used in conjunction with the Political Studies 12 curriculum and could be used as part of a Social Justice 12 unit exploring Government and Citizens' roles in promoting and social justice.

### Main Lesson

To begin the lesson, introduce the topic of "Operation Solidarity" and the Solidarity Crisis of 1983, summarizing the main events of this historical labour-government conflict. See *Operation Solidarity Synopsis* below for a brief overview of these events for the teacher's information. Hand out the Solidarity Worksheet (**Lesson Activity 1**) to the class and instruct them to complete question 1 as they watch the vignette, then play the vignette.

After watching the vignette have the class complete the remainder of the questions. Following completion of the questions; discuss with the class various aspects of the questions. Focus on why (or why not) some of the students believe unions are necessary and whether or not conflict in a democracy is a positive force. The **extension** activity, if chosen will bring this into focus.

For a more in-depth study of the Solidarity event have the students work on **Lesson Activity 2**, "Solidarity: The Largest Political Protest in British Columbia's History" which uses the Digital Museums of Canada exhibit created by the BC Labour Heritage Centre. This activity can be completed as a small group activity which incorporates the Big 3 Ideas of the course and the designated learning standards.

### Extension (Optional):

Begin this section by posing the question: "Do people in this day and age really need unions? Why should people have a right to unionize, aren't there enough protections in place already?" Distribute copies of handout "Resolve the Problem without a Union" (**Lesson Activity 3**) without the section on the three different possible solutions (pages 2-3). Have the class complete the first part, "Outline how you would deal with this problem" individually or in pairs. When the class is finished, discuss some of the options the class came up with, and then disclose what would most likely happen with the three most common ways that have been used to resolve the "Val-Mart" problem by reading the different solutions provided on pages 2-3. These scenarios illustrate how difficult it is for individuals to advocate for themselves in large organizations.

**Appendix 3** Unionizing at Starbucks, have the class read all or a portion, and discuss. The reading gives an example of how difficult it has been for non-unionized Starbucks workers to get basic legal worker rights and entitlements in the Canada.

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

---

### Operation Solidarity Synopsis:

*In 1983 Premier Bill Bennett's right wing Social Credit government's main priorities were a program of fiscal austerity, or as they termed it "restraint", and the promotion of business and free enterprise interests. To this end, in one afternoon in July, the government introduced 26 separate pieces of legislation, that when passed would severely damage the ability of unions to organize and negotiate on behalf of their members and would strip the province of many regulatory checks that protected worker and human rights interests. Among the many pieces of legislation introduced some of the bills included ones that would effectively remove the rights of government and public sector unions to negotiate on behalf of their members for standards in wages and almost all working conditions, one that would allow any public sector employee to be fired "without cause", a bill that would dismantle the BC Human Rights Commission, another bill that would disband the Employment Standards Board and a bill that would effectively allow any employer to lower the wages of its employees if they simply stated they didn't have an "ability to pay".*

*In response activist groups banded together with labour unions and began a mass protest movement. The movement started off by holding a rally with 25 000 people in attendance on the lawn of the BC legislature. In August, Over 40 000 people booked off work or called in sick on the same day to attend a rally at Empire Stadium, shutting down some government services and impressing the public with the mass movement display. Protests were held in towns across the province, including traditional Sacred strongholds. Then during the Social Credit convention, 60 000 protesters marched on the convention in downtown Vancouver, surrounding the convention hotel and demonstrating. This was the largest demonstration in BC history, and still holds the record.*

*When word reached the government that "Operation Solidarity" was discussing the possibility of a General Strike, Bennett finally agreed to meet and negotiate. Labour leader and then President of the IWA, Jack Munroe was chosen to meet with Bennett. After a series of tense negotiations, a deal was struck. Much, although not all, of the proposed legislation was done away with. Many, especially in labour circles were satisfied, many thought that not enough was achieved. Regardless, a General Strike was avoided, and union collective bargaining rights were preserved.*

*For a more detailed account of the Solidarity Crisis of 1983 read Rod Mickleburgh *Globe and Mail* article "25 Years Ago: British Columbia on the Brink of a General Strike".*  
**(Appendix 2)**

Rod Mickleburgh, "25 Years Ago: British Columbia on the Brink of a General Strike,"  
*Globe And Mail*, November 1, 2008,  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/back-from-the-brink-25-years-later/article20389444/?service=print>

## Appendix 2: Solidarity Backgrounder

## Lesson: Solidarity

### **Back from the Brink, 25 years later**

*ROD MICKLEBURGH*

Published Friday, Oct. 31, 2008 10:28PM EDT in the Globe and Mail

Last updated Tuesday, Mar. 31, 2009 09:06PM EDT

It was the night the province of British Columbia stood still.

Twenty-five years ago this month, behind the drapes of Premier Bill Bennett's golden-carpeted, Kelowna living room, the Premier and union leader Jack Munro were engaged in extraordinary, head-to-head bargaining to stave off what was getting closer to an all-out general strike. More than 40,000 government employees were already toughened by nearly two weeks on the picket line. Tens of thousands of teachers and other education workers had been out for a week. And B.C.'s vital ferry system was just hours from being shut down as the next wave in an escalating strike strategy to combat a government onslaught against public-sector unions, social services and human rights that even Mr. Bennett had called doing the unthinkable.

Finally, with the clock ticking toward midnight, the gruff-talking Mr. Munro stepped out on the Premier's darkened patio to announce that a deal had been reached. The few paltry details of the so-called Kelowna Accord contained little sign of government give, with vague promises of consultation, a commitment to keep money saved by the teachers' strike in the education system, and no reprisals. But that was enough for Mr. Munro, supported by other union leaders back in Vancouver, to declare the strikes were over. So ended - not with a bang, but a whimper - one of the most turbulent times and greatest massing of extra-parliamentary opposition to an elected government in this perennially polarized province's history.

"They were truly amazing days," recalled labour-relations expert Mark Thompson at the University of British Columbia. "I knew I was watching history right there. The sheer size of the protests has never been close to being matched, before or since. I've been here 37 years and I've certainly never seen anything like it."

Years later, on the eve of the 25th anniversary of the movement's demise in Kelowna, few who were part of it have forgotten, and emotions over why and how the strikes were called off remain as raw as if events unfolded yesterday.

"No, they sure as hell haven't forgotten," grouched Mr. Munro, who became the target of bitter denunciation both inside and outside the labour movement for his role in negotiating peace.

Yet the former president of the then-powerful International Woodworkers of America is unrepentant over the decision to end the walkouts and the reluctance of his and other private-sector unions to join in.

"It was a serious, serious problem. It would have been a goddamned mess," he said. "You had all these people passing motions for a general strike and none of them was in a union."

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

---

"In retrospect, it was a hell of a call. You're damned if you do, damned if you don't. ... But a lot of people were pretty mad at me."

The only mistake Mr. Munro will own up to is talking to Mr. Bennett on his home turf. "It was weird," he said. "We should have gone to a neutral place, in a hotel or something like that. But everyone was in such a hurry."

There are those who believe the protests that banded together as Operation Solidarity, inspired by the *Solidarnosc* fight-back against Communism in Poland, were a high-water mark for B.C. trade unions, never to be approached again.

That viewpoint is shared by Art Kube, the rotund, dedicated trade unionist who headed Operation Solidarity and became the leading public figure of the anti-government crusade. "I wish the thing had turned out better. It would have given the labour movement in the entire country a lot more courage," he said. "There's a saying that you never really lose a strike, but at the same time, the labour movement became a lot more conservative afterwards."

### **The movement builds**

But what a time it was.

Thousands of people who had never before been part of a union were galvanized to join the struggle, believing it was for social justice, not bread-and-butter labour issues. For the first time, unions, community groups and activist organizations set aside their many differences and banded together in common cause.

Over the course of the summer and into the fall, Operation Solidarity captured the public's imagination. Organizers packed 25,000 people onto the lawns of the legislature. "This is bigger than the Queen," said one admiring police officer.

More than 40,000 union members booked off work one day in August and crammed into creaking Empire Stadium. Two months later, just as observers were writing off Operation Solidarity in the face of government intractability, they gambled on one last protest, knowing that a flop would mean surrender.

Instead, upwards of 60,000 people marched through the Vancouver streets to surround a downtown hotel where the governing Social Credit Party was holding its annual convention, the city's largest-ever political demonstration. Equally impressive rallies were held throughout the province, drawing thousands of protesters in such sacred strongholds as Williams Lake, Kamloops and Prince George.

The explosion had been set off by a breathtaking series of 26 bills, introduced one by one in the legislature on a single, unforgettable day in early July. They wiped out the province's human-rights commission and rent-review office, tightened government control over school boards and colleges, watered down medicare, dropped government enforcement of employment standards, and extended wage controls indefinitely.

The most contentious legislation, Bills 2 and 3, gutted union contracts in the public sector, giving employers the power to fire workers without cause or regard to seniority. Many were let go that very day.



## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

---

Operation Solidarity took off immediately. Independent Canadian unions sat down with their bitter rivals in the B.C. Federation of Labour. Gays and lesbians discussed strategy with church groups. One prominent activist lawyer was heard to say that his practice was going to seed. "All I do is go to meetings," he said.

"We had book clubs. We studied. We smoked too many cigarettes. We drank too much beer," remembered Frances Wasserlein, a prominent member of a new protest group, Women Against the Budget. "I also recall a lot of pacing and talking at the back of union halls. There were disagreements, but everyone listened."

Activist poet Tom Wayman, who subsequently denounced the Kelowna Accord in a long bitter poem called *The Face of Jack Munro* ("How could it occur/that direction of our struggle/shrank to one man...") said the atmosphere was infectious.

"There was a feeling throughout B.C. that something was happening, that everything was up for grabs. People stopped talking about sports and what was on TV last night. It was heady stuff."

For many, the emotional highlight of the entire campaign took place during the rally at Empire Stadium. After every nook and cranny seemed to be filled, in came the rousing band of the Vancouver firefighters, followed by hundreds of uniformed firefighters marching in step. A roar erupted from the crowd that seemed to go on forever.

"The firefighters risked a huge set of consequences by walking out. Yet there they were," said Ms. Wasserlein, still moved by the memory.

The opposition NDP, meanwhile, staged round-the-clock filibusters in an unsuccessful attempt to halt the bills. At one point, as tempers frayed, party leader Dave Barrett was dragged out of the legislature by two sergeants-at-arms, who dumped him in the corridor on his rear end.

### **Champagne and bitterness**

It took until late October for the government to blink, just a bit. By inserting his savvy deputy minister Norman Spector into exhaustive contract negotiations covering the 40,000 members of the B.C. Government Employees Union, Mr. Bennett signalled that he was open to exempting unions from the onerous provisions of Bill 2 and Bill 3.

Still, there was no agreement and the BCGEU hit the bricks on Nov. 1. A week later, the teachers went out, while negotiations continued at the B.C. Labour Relations Board to get the BCGEU a contract and prevent further walkouts. British Columbians held their collective breath.

Diane Woods, a vice-president of the BCGEU and one of the first workers to be fired, said everyone was conscious of the high stakes involved. The tension was palpable.

"It was pretty scary being in that room and thinking what we were involved in. I don't think anyone went through it all without some tear-shedding. I know I broke down from emotion and exhaustion several times."

On the afternoon of Nov. 13, the BCGEU and the government concluded a new collective agreement. Firing without cause was gone. While the BCGEU celebrated with champagne, social activists wondered what would happen to their concerns during Mr. Munro's dramatic meeting with Mr. Bennett.

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

---

Basically, they ended up with nothing. When push came to shove, it was a union show. Late in the game, activists learned the hard truth that union leaders were not prepared to sacrifice their members' paycheques for non-union matters.

"The community, the labour movement. It was all so powerful," Ms. Wasserlein said. "We were getting stronger and stronger every day, and then it was trashed. What a waste."

Cliff Andstein, now at the Canadian Labour Congress but then the chief negotiator for the BCGEU, agrees that the final settlement was a bitter pill for Solidarity's activist coalition. But he sees a deeper significance in the struggle, despite the disappointment of the final outcome.

"This was the first qualified success on the continent in combatting or confronting that Reaganomics, Thatcherism ideology that was everywhere at the time," Mr. Andstein said. "It gave heart to the public sector in other provinces. It sent a signal to people that fighting back was possible."

As for Art Kube, who famously told Mr. Munro over the phone at the Premier's house to "get the hell out of there," there are plenty of good memories, but regret at not accomplishing more.

"It came in like a prairie wildfire, and it went out like a prairie wildfire," he said. "We simply didn't have the clout."

Source: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/back-from-the-brink-25-years-later/article20389444/?service=print>

**Additional information on the Solidarity Movement can be found in the interviews with Cliff Andstein and Art Kube found at the [BC Labour Heritage Centre's Oral History Project page](#)**

\* Ken Novakowski interviews Cliff Andstein on November 8, 2018 as part of the BC Labour Heritage Centres Oral History Project. The section on the Solidarity Campaign begins at 00:21:34 of the interview. The interview and its transcript are found here. [Link](#)

\* Jim Sinclair and David Walker interview Art Kube on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018 as part of the BC Labour Heritage Centres Oral History Project. The 2<sup>nd</sup> section is on the Solidarity Campaign. The interview and its transcript are found here. [Link](#)

\* Sean Griffin and Bailey Garden interview George Hewison on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017 as part of the BC Labour Heritage Centres Oral History Project. The section on the Solidarity Campaign begins at [01:45:29] of the interview with his discussion on the role of the Unemployed Action Centres. The interview and its transcript are found here. [Link](#)



### She Organized a Starbucks. Then They Fired Her

Frédérique Martineau says despite the corporation's justification, she feels targeted.



[Zak Vescera](#) 22 Nov 2023 [The Tyee](#)

Zak Vescera is The Tyee's labour reporter. This reporting beat is made possible by the [Local Journalism Initiative](#).

In February, then 20-year-old barista Frédérique Martineau helped unionize the Vancouver Starbucks where she worked as a shift supervisor.

In September, the company closed the store.

And this month, Starbucks fired Martineau, who had moved to another outlet.

Martineau, who had worked at the company for five years, said she was fired for what she calls vague reasons related to the corporation's "standard of communication."

But she believes the real reason is her organizing work with the United Steelworkers, which wants to unionize the coffee giant's locations in British Columbia and Alberta.

Martineau said things changed after her organizing efforts.

"I don't think they ever wanted me. I think they knew what they were going to do."

In a statement, a Starbucks spokesperson said no employee "has been or will be disciplined or separated for supporting, organizing or otherwise engaging in lawful union activity." The company did not respond to specific questions about why Martineau was fired.

It is the latest in a long series of conflicts between Starbucks and United Steelworkers, which has accused the company of trying to discourage organizing and punish employees who vote to unionize.

United Steelworkers District 3 director Scott Lunny, who represents the union's members across Western Canada, said the company should give Martineau her job back.

He said the union has filed yet another legal complaint against Starbucks at the BC Labour Relations Board, in part because of Martineau's termination.

"This is not a step in the right direction for our relationship with Starbucks," Lunny said.



Frédérique Martineau's firing has sparked a complaint to the Labour Relations Board by the United Steelworkers

### **Martineau's campaign**

Martineau began organizing with United Steelworkers Local 2009 while working as a shift supervisor at a Starbucks in Vancouver's tony Dunbar neighbourhood.

Martineau had been a partner — the company's term for employee — with the company for years in Canada and the United States. But she said staff at the Dunbar location felt overworked and underappreciated.

That led to a successful, covert campaign to unionize the location with Local 2009, which already represented the only other three unionized Starbucks shops in British Columbia.

The move was fiercely opposed by managers, Martineau said, adding she never intended to hurt the company.

"I was just trying to make everyone's lives better," she said. "I'm not out to get anyone. I'm not out to get Starbucks. I'm just trying to make the job we all love better."

Months later, in September, Starbucks confirmed it would close the Dunbar location, saying its lease had come up for renewal.

"I was like, touché. You got me there," Martineau said in a recent interview. "Maybe I'll unionize another one."

Staff who opted to stay with the company were offered new jobs at other locations. Martineau landed at the store's location at West 16th Avenue and Macdonald Street, in the Arbutus Ridge neighbourhood.

Martineau said things weren't the same. She wasn't hired as a shift supervisor, meaning she was effectively demoted. Her hours were reduced.

And in the first week of November, she said, managers told her in front of colleagues and customers that she was under investigation.

Martineau said she was accused of violating the company's communication policy by complaining about her reduced shifts, and of allegedly using profanity in the workplace — something she denied.

She said she was also told some employees were uncomfortable with her discussing the unionization at the Dunbar store, even though management explicitly told her she was allowed to talk about it.

A few days later, Martineau said, she showed up early for a shift. She put on her apron, plugged in a dead iPad and was greeting customers and sorting dishes when she was called into the backroom and fired.

She left crying, she said, and called the union.

Lunny said he has little doubt Martineau's termination was related to her role with the Steelworkers.

---

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

---

Martineau spearheaded the unionization effort on Dunbar Street and spoke in the media about her experience leading that campaign, including [with The Tyee](#).

“It certainly was not a secret to anyone that Frédérique was a leader in the union and a leader amongst the Starbucks workers,” Lunny said.

Lunny said the Steelworkers had been working with Starbucks to broker an agreement to support staff from the closed Dunbar store, including a promise there would be no retaliation against union organizers. But he said that deal was never finalized.

### **Starbucks and Steelworkers**

Martineau’s termination is just the latest flashpoint between the Steelworkers and Starbucks in B.C., and part of a much larger trend of the company fighting a wave of labour organizing at its stores across North America.

The Steelworkers filed a legal complaint against Starbucks earlier this year after the company gave a pay bump to all its employees in B.C., except those who had joined a union. The company later reversed its decision and agreed to pay out those workers.

Lunny said the Steelworkers have now filed yet another unfair labour practice complaint with the province’s labour board, related in part to Martineau’s termination and in part to the ongoing bargaining at the Surrey and Langley locations.

“We can’t really seem to get a collective agreement that’s acceptable to those stores,” Lunny said.

Lunny said he doesn’t aim to pick a fight with Starbucks, or any employer. But he said the coffee company hasn’t been willing to meet workers’ demands.

“They’re not outrageous demands that these folks have, considering how hard they work and how much money Starbucks makes,” Lunny said.

The Steelworkers have not filed an unfair labour practice complaint related to the closing of the Dunbar store.

The Steelworkers don’t have concrete proof, Lunny said, that the union bid was why the store closed.

But Martineau said she personally believes that is the case.

“Me being terminated perhaps sheds new light on why the store was closed. Because if it’s not because we were union, then why fire the organizer?” Martineau said.

Starbucks, in statements to The Tyee, has repeatedly said it has no problem with employees unionizing.

But the company has come under scrutiny in the United States for its tough line on unionization. Former CEO Howard Schultz appeared before a Senate hearing [to testify](#) on the subject this March.

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

---

Martineau, for her part, said she is not sure what she will do if the company declines to give her back her job.

But she said she does not regret what she did.

“I don’t regret it, because at the end of the day I know that all I was doing was looking out for everyone that I worked with,” Martineau said.

Reprinted with the permission of the Tyee, adapted from [She Organized a Starbucks. Then They Fired Her | The Tyee](#)

For further reading : [Rights + Justice](#), [Labour + Industry](#)

Additional Stories on the topic can be found at

Meet the 20-Year-Old Who Unionized a Vancouver Starbucks (May 10, 2023) <https://thetyee.ca/News/2023/05/10/20-Year-Old-Unionized-Vancouver-Starbucks/>

Starbucks Ups Stakes in War of Words with Union (December 7, 2023) [Starbucks Ups Stakes in War of Words with Union | The Tyee](#)

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

---

### Questions for Discussion:

1. What were Martineau's motivations for trying to organize a union at Starbucks?
2. Can an individual go up against a large corporation to protect his rights and win? In the instances where people managed to win against Starbucks for unfair work practices, were they able to do it on their own as individuals?
3. Which union helped to organize and defend the rights to organize a union at the Starbucks? Why do you think the workers didn't create their own union to lead their organization efforts?
4. Why might it be difficult for a wronged worker to get compensation from their employer? What might the worker be afraid will happen to them?
5. Who has more resources and money, a large union or a corporation like Starbucks? Explain
6. Where do unions get their money? Where do corporations get their money?
7. Research and report on the BC Labour Laws that protect workers like Frédérique Martineau attempts to organize a union.

**Lesson Activity 1: Solidarity Worksheet**

**Lesson: Solidarity**

*“Solidarity” Worksheet*

**While You Watch....**

1. From your observations of the video, in what different ways do people try to push back at what they think are unjust actions by the government?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**After Watching....**

2. In a democracy, why is it important to be able to have different methods of influencing or changing government action other than just voting? Use examples from the vignette if you wish.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---





## Lesson Activity 2

## Solidarity

### **Solidarity: The Largest Political Protest in British Columbia's History BC**

Explore the Digital Virtual Museum's exhibition for Solidarity: The Largest Political Protest in British Columbia's History created by the BC Labour Heritage Centre [Digital Museums Canada](#)

#### **Historical Context:**

When exploring the Solidarity Movement in British Columbia in 1983, you will encounter numerous references to charter rights. Bear in mind that at the time of this event the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was a newly enacted piece of legislation. It was passed on April 17<sup>th</sup> 1982 and applied to all laws in Canada, both Federal and Provincial. However, the provisions of Bill 2 and Bill 3 in British Columbia had not been tested in court for compliance with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Additionally, the stripping of core social programs and the closure of the Human Rights Branch and the Human Rights Commission were challenged as Charter violations. Workers looked to the Charter for protection, particularly focusing on rights related to freedom of association, freedom of life, liberty, and security of the person, and equal treatment before the law. The testing of Charter Rights in the Supreme Court of Canada would be an ongoing chapter of Canadian labour, political and judicial history in the decades that followed.

For further reading and research on this topic refer to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives "Work Life: Labour and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms: 35 Years of Experience [Link](#)

#### **Activity**

In small groups designated by the teacher...

Select one 3 "Big Ideas" of the course and prepare a presentation to the class on how the causes, events and outcomes of the Solidarity Movement in 1983 demonstrates the concepts and examples of the designated "Big Idea"

#### **The Big Ideas**

- Understanding how political decisions are made is critical to being an informed and engaged citizen.
- Political institutions and ideology shape both the exercise of power and the nature of political outcomes.
- Decision making in a democratic system of government is influenced by the distribution of political and social power.

In your presentation apply the Big 6 Historical Thinking Concepts of significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, perspective and ethical judgment that apply to your topic.

## Lesson: Solidarity

### Lesson Activity 3: Resolve the Problem without a union

Many people believe that unions are unfair organizations that have too much influence and power over the work place. Some believe the stories they are told about how unions make unrealistic demands that can sometimes kill businesses. A very common belief about unions states that they may have been necessary to protect workers in the past, but that now they are not needed any more.

Let's see if unions are unnecessary by trying to resolve a real world employee/employer conflict without a union. Read the scenario below then choose a course of action to follow if you were the employee to resolve your problem.

You have worked at Val-Mart, one of the largest "big box" retailers, for two years. Times are tough economically, there are few jobs out there, and when you started working you were just happy to get a job. You don't always get all the hours you need, but are glad you have something.

You are a hard worker and don't like to cause trouble for your boss. You figure that if you work hard and show that you are flexible, you might one day be able to get one of the assistant supervisor positions that are sometimes advertised in the break room. Lately you have noticed some things that are bothering you at work, however.

You know the law says that after working five hours you are entitled to a half hour lunch break, but Val-Mart routinely schedules you and others in the store for six to seven hour shifts without a lunch break. You spend most of your shift on your feet, stocking shelves, or working a busy cash register. It can be difficult sometimes to do this without a chance to sit down for a while or grab a bite to eat. When you asked a supervisor about this issue once, he told you that half hour lunch breaks were only Val-Mart policy if you worked a shift of eight or more hours.

You and others in the store have also noticed lately that your paychecks haven't been correct. You have been keeping track of the hours you have been paid and noticed that there are 8-12 hours a month unaccounted for. When you asked a supervisor about this, he flatly stated that the time sheets were never wrong, and that he checked them himself.

Your fellow workers grumble about these problems, but are afraid to make a fuss. You think that the problem can be resolved easily if you can get someone to listen. What will you do?

Outline how you would deal with this problem:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Note to the teacher:

**Do not distribute this page until students complete the previous section**

### **Solution 1: Go see the store manager and complain.**

The store manager is a busy man. People on the floor like yourself usually deal with floor supervisors, but it is not impossible to see the manager. After your shift one day you knock on his office door and he tells you to come in.

You lay out your concerns to him, he seems sympathetic, but in the end nothing is done. He claims that if my floor supervisor thinks the time sheets are accurate, he has to back him up. And as far as the lunch break issue is concerned he claims his hands are tied. Its company policy and he can't change it. When you bring up that it may be against the law, the manager get irritated and says that if you don't like it here you are welcome to find another job elsewhere. You know jobs are scarce right now and most that are available are similar to this one. You leave with your complaints unresolved.

### **Solution 2: File a complaint against the company.**

You find out by searching the internet that you are able to file a complaint against your employer with a government agency. It's a bit complicated, but you manage to fill out the correct forms and send them in. You get your complaint arbitration date and see that it's in six months! Apparently there is a bit of a back log so you have to wait a while. When you go back to work after filing the complaint you notice that you have been scheduled for all of the least popular shifts and the supervisors shoot you dirty looks all the time.

You wait till your date; gather all your pay stubs and anything else you can get as evidence. The company might lose a lot of money if you win. They might owe compensation to lots of employees. So when your arbitration date comes, the company sends a lawyer to represent their company. He talks circles around you and produces all sorts of timesheets and other evidence. He claims that you were given your correct breaks and were paid correctly.

The arbitrator says that he can't decide in your favour unless you have other witnesses who will testify. None of your co-workers were willing to testify because they were afraid to lose their jobs. It's the company's word against yours and the complaint is dismissed.

A week later you receive notice that you have been "laid off" from your job at Val-Mart.

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

---

### **Solution 3: Sue the company!**

After nearly a month of secret nagging you manage to finally convince six other employees to sign up with you for a class action law suit against Val-Mart. You find a lawyer online who will work for a portion of your settlement if you win. He doesn't have a big law firm behind him or a lot of resources, but he's all you and your buddies can afford.

While you are waiting for your court date two of your fellow complainants are mysteriously fired. They get written up for supposedly not following store policy three times each in one week and are let go. This is tough on them, as you know there are very few jobs out there.

Your day in court arrives and the company has a four person legal team! You found out the day before the trial that Val-Mart in just one year alone made 11 billion dollars in profit and that they have a legal budget in the millions, just to deal with complaints like these. You don't understand all of the proceedings in the trial but your lawyer looks a little over-whelmed.

The company's lawyers claim that you and the others are just angry at the company for the "justified" firing of two of our number and that you are looking for an easy payout. They call some of the Val-Mart supervisors as witnesses who tell the court their procedures for checking time sheets, and they all claim they follow the law in regards to break times. The judge decides that we have not fulfilled the burden of proof required and dismisses the case.

A week later the rest of your group is fired.

You think this is all too farfetched? (See **Appendix 3 Unionizing at Starbucks** for more on the story)