



Bloody Sunday

Film Summary: While documenting the events of the 1938 Relief Camp Workers Sit Down Strikes and Occupations in downtown Vancouver, this film presents their reasons for the protest, and the radically differing reactions to their collective protest by the three levels of government: city, province, and national governments.

Curriculum Application
Social Studies 11

The Essential Question: What motivated the strikers of 1938 to take collective action to resolve their problems and how effective were these actions in finding solutions to the problems they faced?

Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Focus questions for the vignette provide a short lesson option. (15 minutes)
2. Small Group Activity to analyze the vignettes, written documents and photographs
3. Students will analyze conflicting primary sources from the 1938 protest occupations, including media and participant perspectives.
4. Students can extend the study to examine more recent examples of collective political actions.

Learning Objectives

1. To consider the reasons why people organize in collective action and to examine the tactics they employ to gain public attention for their cause.
2. To examine the effectiveness of such tactics in gaining public and governmental attention.
3. To specifically examine the collective political strategy of Sit-Down Protests and Occupation as employed in the 1938 Vancouver Unemployed workers' protests.
4. To compare the range of government responses to these forms of collective political protest actions, both negative and positive.
5. To examine how police were used to deal with these protests and whether their actions served the law or justice.

Materials and Resources Provided

- [“Bloody Sunday” Episode 2- Working People – A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- Appendix 1: Backgrounder-Bloody Sunday
- Activity 1: Bloody Sunday: Photographic Primary Sources
- Activity 2: Bloody Sunday: Written Primary Sources
- Lesson Activity 1: Discussion questions and classroom activities.
- Photographic Analysis Sheet

Additional Suggested Materials

- [“On-to-Ottawa Lesson Plan](#)
- [These were the reasons...Chapter 5: Unemployed Get a Union – Stories from the relief camps](#)
- [On-to-Ottawa 75th Anniversary Celebration](#)
- [On-to-Ottawa and For Twenty Cents a Day videos](#)
- [Begbie Contest Political Cartoons](#)

Vignette Questions

1. What objectives did the unemployed men have when they gathered in Vancouver in 1938?
2. What objective did Steve Brodie have in his role in the unemployed protest?
3. When approximately 1200 men marched in downtown Vancouver on May 10th 1938 what 3 buildings were they set on occupying? Speculate on why these buildings were targeted.
4. What method of protest did the leaders insist on following? Explain their reasoning for this strategy.
5. How did the RCMP act when the protestors refused to leave the Post Office?
6. What action did many Vancouverites take to show their support for the unemployed men?

Lesson Activities

1. Pre-Teaching: Students will have learned about the Great Depression in Canada, and the responses of the Federal and Provincial Government to the mass unemployment, including relief camps, soup lines, and the earlier “On To Ottawa” protest action. This may include the Lesson “On To Ottawa” that accompanies the Working People- A History of Labour in British Columbia vignette.
2. The teacher will then distribute the handout entitled “Bloody Sunday: Backgrounder”.
3. Show “Bloody Sunday” Working People- A History of Labour in British Columbia. Use the Vignette questions above to guide the students understanding of the video.
4. Distribute the Primary Sources Handouts. The pictures can also be shown on an overhead or projector, and the written accounts read out to the class, or have them read them individually, or in groups.
5. Use the Discussion Questions and the Extension Activity Questions with the students individually or in small groups to further analyze the written and photographic primary documents.

Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by Gavin Hainsworth

Appendix 1: Backgrounder

Lesson: Bloody Sunday

BLOODY SUNDAY, 1938: “When The People Occupy In Protest” By Gavin Hainsworth

In 1935, after the On-to-Ottawa trek, the unpopular Conservative government of **R.B. Bennett (1930-35)** lost the election to the liberals under **William Lyon Mackenzie King (1921-26, 1935-48)**. King had won the election in part due to the economic fears and uncertainties of the Great Depression— and in fact used the slogan “King, or Chaos” in the election. Once elected, he honored his election promise of closing the relief camps that had fueled the On-to-Ottawa trek. In their stead, in 1936, Prime Minister King convinced the provinces to co-fund a workers’ farm placement program, wherein unemployed workers of both genders would be placed on farms as workers, and provided accommodation. However, British Columbia did not have enough farms for the unemployed, and therefore something similar was created through forestry camps for the workers. The Premier of B.C. at this time was **Thomas Dufferin (Duff) Pattullo (1933-41)**, also a liberal, shared King’s philosophy of extending work and relief to the unemployed that had not been offered by the previous conservative government of **Simon Fraser Tolmie (1928-33)**.

By 1938, though, these programs were both unpopular with the people involved, and unpopular with the governments funding them. They seemed little more than a rebranded version of what went before.

In April, 1938, Pattullo announced that the province would no longer fund the placement plan; moreover, he cut all relief for any people in BC who were not from there. The result was a sudden increase in homeless men on Vancouver’s streets again, and a new round of organizing by unions and other worker organizations determined to force the government to offer more support. Two additional forces in this process were :

- **Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) Party**, later to be renamed the New Democratic Party (NDP). The CCF aimed to alleviate the suffering that workers and farmers, the ill and old endure under capitalism through the creation of a Co-operative Commonwealth, which would entail economic co-operation, socialization of the economy and political reform. The Co-operative Commonwealth was defined as a "community freed from the domination of irresponsible financial and economic power in which all social means of production and distribution, including land, are socially owned and controlled either by voluntarily organized groups of producers and consumers or - in the case of major public services and utilities and such productive and distributive enterprises as can be conducted most efficiently when owned in common - by public corporations responsible to the people's elected representatives"
- **Communist Party of Canada**, although it was banned, it worked through groups such as the Workers Unity League, and the Relief Camp Workers’ Union. The CPC was the only party to make a systemic critique of the depression as a crisis of capitalism. It was also the first political party in Canada to call for the introduction of unemployment insurance; a national health insurance scheme; making education universally accessible; social and employment assistance to youth; labour legislation including health and safety regulations, regulation of the working day and holidays, as well as a minimum wage for women and youth.

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

The Relief Camp Workers and the National Unemployed Workers Association played significant roles in protest marches and demonstrations and campaigns such as the On-to-Ottawa trek.

Since the Trek, the Communist party had slowly shifted in a new direction, in large part because of the influence of Moscow. The Soviet Union had decided, as Nazi Germany expanded its influence in Europe, that it was necessary to move Communist parties around the world to a more populist, anti-Fascist footing.

For Canadian Communists, this meant joining the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, but also building more widely popular protest movements in the vein of the Trek.

While the Trek had been a somewhat spontaneous event, Premier Pattullo's cuts were an opportunity to try to craft the same sort of popular movement out of a new political opportunity.

For the CCF, the unemployment crisis was an opportunity to elect its candidates to the BC Legislature as MLAs, and to potentially form government in British Columbia by breaking through past the conservatives and liberals. They had won 7 out of 48 seats in the 1937 election. One was **Harold Winch (1933-52)**, who would become leader of the BC CCF in 1938, serving as such until 1953.

The tactic selected by Unemployed Workers Association and the Relief Camp Workers were a Sit-Down Strike and Occupation. In a **Sit-Down Strike** the people simply sit-down, and refuse to move or to work. It had been used in the factories previously, but not as a form of civil protest. The planners chose to adapt this form of civil protest by extending it to **Occupation**, where protesters enter a building and refuse to leave until their demands are met. In total 1200 unemployed men began this protest on May 20, 1938.

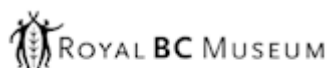
They chose to occupy three sites chosen for the symbolic importance:

- 200 occupied the **Hotel Georgia**, representing capital;
- 300 occupied the **Art Gallery**, (former Art Gallery) representing the city and province;
- and 700 occupied the **Post Office** (now the Sinclair Centre), representing the Federal Government

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Activity 1: Photographic Primary Sources

Lesson: Bloody Sunday



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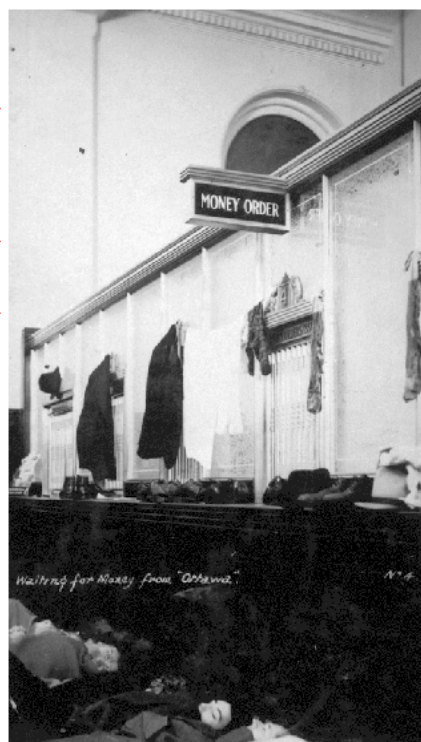
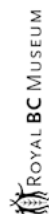
Title: "Government Hospitality"; a demonstrator sleeping ...

A "Tin Canner" on a Victoria Street 1938
BC Provincial Archives A-01657



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Web: www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca Email: access@www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca
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Title: "Waiting for money from Ottawa"; sitdowners; men ...

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Plain-clothes police officer beating demonstrators with billy clubs during the post office riot; Bloody Sunday; *Vancouver BC Provincial Archives Item C-07969* -



ROYAL BC MUSEUM

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Title: "Citizens Protest Police Terror"; Bloody Sunday; ...

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Activity 2: Written Primary Sources

Lesson: Bloody Sunday

SOURCE #1: Excerpt from “The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest E. Winch and His Times”, by Dorothy G. Steeves (1960):

Petitions to the federal and provincial governments...were fruitless. After a month of mass meetings, tin-canning and begging for food about 1,200 men decided to bring their plight to the attention of the public in a novel way. They marched into the Georgia Hotel, the Art Gallery and the Post Office in orderly fashion, sat down and stayed there. It was the famous Sit-Down Strike of the unemployed in Vancouver. After a few days they were persuaded to move out of the Georgia Hotel, by the temporary payment of \$500 in relief, but they stayed in the other buildings for four weeks. Most Vancouverites were intrigued and sympathetic. Women took in food for them and the Mother's Council which had 17 women's organizations as affiliates supplied many needs. The Post Office sit-downers edited an amusing little gazette which was printed for them by friends and handed out to the public. It was good propaganda. At the masthead it stated:

“This paper is not published or paid for by the department of Labor or the Government of British Columbia.”

The editorials publicized the situation of the men and asked for a comprehensive works program. The humorous column “Post Office Flashes” raised much merriment:

“Many works of art may be viewed when the sailors remove their shirts”

“Sit-downers would prefer to raise callouses on their hands”

“The atmosphere has been cleared up considerable with the arrival of a shipment of new socks”

“The commissar department is featuring the Pattullo sandwich this week. Two slices of bread jammed together”

And so on...It was good fun but it couldn't last. The Post Office did a roaring business and a lot of people visited the Art Gallery, but it wasn't the paintings they came to see. The officials at both buildings were on excellent terms with the boys. People brought in radios, blankets and books. Lines of washing were strung up and it was all very cozy.

The authorities were angry, because they felt outwitted. They couldn't arrest the men, because no crimes had been committed, as Police Chief Foster pointed out. So they planned secretly for a police raid and eviction by force. At 5a.m. on Sunday, June 19th (1938), police cars arrived at the Art Gallery and Post Office, equipped with tear gas bombs. The men were told they had twenty minutes to get out. Harold Winch was at the Art Gallery, as he had been tipped off and had rushed to the scene. He implored the strikers to come out quietly and not to damage the works of art. After the bombs were thrown they did disperse without any trouble, although some were badly affected by the gas. It was a different story at the Post Office where all the windows on the main floor were smashed after the gas was released and the men came stumbling out to be precipitated into a scene of frightful violence and fighting, one of the worst ever witnessed in the city. The jobless battled with their fists and improvised clubs against the police whose blows from quirts and batons rained down unmercifully. There were severe casualties on both sides. The

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

strike leader, Steve Brodie, was almost battered to death, before he was rescued by an RCMP sergeant. The men, maddened by the gas attack and the beatings, streamed down Cordova and Hastings streets pursued by the police, and broke hundreds of plate glass windows in the stores. Finally they found refuge in the Ukrainian Labor Hall where volunteers fed them and bound their wounds.

At an emergency meeting of the CCF executive and the MLAs the manner in which the eviction was carried out was called “ghastly, inhuman and brutal”. The difference in attitude and behavior between the city police under Chief Foster and the RCMP who were in charge of the Post Office eviction was stressed. The CCF statement demanded the resignation of the whole Legislature, because the conduct of the eviction was “a grave reflection upon the intelligence and integrity of every member of the House.”

The excitement was not finished for that day. After a mass meeting at the Powell Street grounds a crowd of 2,000 converged on the police station to demand the release of the arrested men, 22 in number. Again, Harold Winch showed his good sense, when he managed to climb up on a car in the midst of the shouting mob and urged people to go home: “We’ve had one riot this morning – we don’t want another one”, he said. At midnight he was at the Victoria boat seeing a delegation of the unemployed off to see the cabinet.

Next day, however, Mr. Pattullo was in town and met leaders of the Relief Project Workers’ Union, CCF MLAs and a group of pastors from city churches. But nobody could be as adamant as Duff Pattullo once he had made up his mind. He refused all pleas for emergency food rations and further action. It was up to Ottawa, he thought. To the ministers he said: “There comes a time when too much sympathy can be shown the men. That time had come in Vancouver”.

Twenty minutes after it had started the meeting adjourned without progress. Mayor Miller of Vancouver and the Provincial Minister of Labor accused communists and trouble-makers of fomenting the riot. (p.117-118)

SOURCE #2:Newspaper Editorial: (Excerpt): Vancouver Province, June 20, 1938

“But the strikers can by no means be condemned alone. They were foolish and ill-advised. They may even have yielded to agitators as Premier Pattullo suggests. But who zealously prepared the ground in which the seeds of the agitators took root? Who but the two responsible governments—the one in Ottawa and the one in Victoria, which have, for months now, keep the question of unemployment shuttling back and forth between the two capitals.

The record is about as bad as it could be. The two governments have been faithless to the unemployed, faithless to the cause of good government in Canada. The Federal Government tried to persuade the men that there would be work for them if they would only leave British Columbia; the Provincial Government offered to assist them on their way. But neither government thought it worthwhile to suggest to the men where work was to be found. And the men, not unnaturally, thought they were being hoaxed, and refused to move...”

SOURCE #3: Steve Brodie's Personal Account: Steve Brodie, "Bloody Sunday," in Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage* (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing Company, 1985), p. 90-91 (fn 2).

"A proclamation was read, ordering us to depart to our homes as we were now declared to be an unlawful assembly. Failure to depart would mean forcible eviction. I immediately reported to Major Hill [the commanding RCMP officer] that we were even more anxious to avoid damage to property and to ourselves than he was, so being now declared unlawful, we placed ourselves under arrest. To be certain that there could be no misunderstanding, I asked the men if they now willingly submitted to arrest. They shook the building with a loud "yes." I turned to Hill and said, "Sir, we are now your prisoners." He replied, "I have no orders about arrest," whereupon I gave him a short lecture on the law, reminding him that being only a policeman, he had no legal right to punish. That, I assured him, was the function of our courts, and asked again that he do his lawful duty, and place us under arrest. I offered to march with the men to any place he would designate where we would await trial by magistrate. When he refused, I asked the same of City Police Inspector Grundy. His only answer was, "We are here to keep you moving when you hit the street. There will be no arrests."

SOURCE #4: Maurice Rush's Personal Account: Steve Brodie, "Bloody Sunday," in Sean Griffin, ed., *Fighting Heritage* (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing Company, 1985), p. 106-107

"The scene at the Ukrainian Hall was one that I will never forget. The grass outside and every available bit of space inside were covered with injured and gassed men. Blankets and bandages, collected earlier for medical aid for China, were rushed to the hall. Members of the YCL and other organizations tended to the wounded and set up a kitchen to feed the men"

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

Lesson Activity 1: Discussion Questions

Lesson: Bloody Sunday

Discussion Questions: The following questions can be used with students individually or in small groups to guide them through their understanding of the lesson materials including; the vignette, the backgrounder, the written and photographic primary sources.

1. What were the aims and goals of the Sit-Down Protesters?
2. How were these goals communicated?
3. What levels of support did they have, and by whom?
4. What resistance did they face by those opposed to their goals?
5. What responses did they receive for those in authority? To what degree and how were they positive or negative in the advancing of the goals of the protest?
6. What responses and reactions did they receive from the three levels of government – city, provincial, and federal?
7. What role did propaganda and the use of media play in the protest?
8. Examine the three differing outcomes of the protest at the three protest sites – the Georgia Hotel, the Art Gallery, and the Post Office. What factors influenced the three different outcomes and how?
9. In your informed opinion, to what degree did the protest actually serve the original aims and goals of the 1938 Sit-Down Protests?

Investigate the Primary Sources – Part 1

If the students have not had a lesson on interpreting historical photographs, the exercise sheet included in this package “Photographic Analysis Sheet” may be useful before proceeding to this next section.

Analyze the five primary source photographs contained in this package, and discuss them in groups of three.

Questions to consider:

1. Why did the photographer take a picture of this image? What were the photographer’s point of view and what message was being conveyed?
2. Was it ‘staged’ for effect or was this a spontaneous (candid) shot?
3. What is missing, or was omitted? What lies outside the frame of the photograph?
4. Is there an event taking place? Describe, but do not interpret, what you see.
5. How does the visual make you feel? Describe your personal feelings and judgments about the image, based on what you have seen.

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

Investigate the Primary Sources – Part 2

Analyze the four written primary source contained in this package, and discuss them in groups of three.

Questions to consider:

1. What may be considered fact, opinion or inference in these written sources?
2. What are the sources, purposes, and point of views of the material?
3. What information is contained within these sources, and what is missing, or omitted?
4. What do the written accounts make you feel? Describe your personal feelings and judgments about the written, based on what you have learned about “Bloody Sunday”.
5. Research a more recent example of Sit-Down Strikes & Occupations and compare it to the events of Bloody Sunday 1938. To what degree are they similar and different? What role did the media play in these differences?

Photographic Analysis Sheet

Interpreting Photographs

Like political cartoons, photographs must be carefully analyzed. Many people think that photographs have no bias because the image is a snapshot of an exact moment in time. However, there are many factors to consider when analyzing photographs. The photographer has bias, and can influence the outcome of the snapshot. It is important to remember that a photographer can influence, mislead, misrepresent, or dramatize; just as other artists can, using their distinct medium.

General questions to consider

- Who took the picture?
- What was the purpose of the photograph?
- Why did the photographer take a picture of this image?
- What were the photographer's point of view and what message was being conveyed?
- Was it 'staged' for effect or was this a spontaneous (candid) shot?
- Was there an interest group who paid to have the image taken?
- Was it created for propaganda, as a record of family history, or even as a joke?
- What is missing, or was omitted?
- What lies outside the frame of the photograph?
- Is there a caption, and, if so, does this influence your reaction to and meaning of the photograph?

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

Part 2: Detailed Observation

Now that you have thought about the photographer and the purpose of the photograph, it is time to observe the images themselves. This may be organized into four main categories: background knowledge, objective observations, subjective reactions, and inferences.

b. Background Knowledge:

To obtain a deeper understanding of a photograph, the observer must have some background knowledge of the historical context of the times. This is to be able to understand the political, social, and economic issues within the image.

- **What is your knowledge of the snapshot, based on your background knowledge, studies, and experiences?**
- **Can you surmise the geographical location of the image or the date or era in which it was created?**

Note: 'Grounding' the photograph in a place and space can aid in the understanding of the picture.

c. Objective Observations:

Next, describe your 'objective observations' of the images. Avoid personal feelings, and instead concentrate on the objects, structures, people, facial expressions, clothing, etc.

- **Is there an event taking place? Describe, but do not interpret, what you see.**

c. Subjective Reactions:

After this step, it is time to interpret your objective observations.

- **How does the visual make you feel? Describe your personal feelings and judgments about the image, based on what you have seen.**

d. Inferences:

Lastly, once you have studied the historical context of the image, and analyzed it objectively and subjectively, it is time to write down your conclusions.

- **What can you infer about the photograph now that you have analyzed it?**

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