



Farmworkers

Film Summary: This film examines the working lives of “Canada’s Forgotten Workers,” the farmworkers whose labour fell outside much of the protective labour legislation. Provides an overview of their living and working conditions in the 1970s and invites students to compare with those of modern farmworkers and migrant workers in BC

Curriculum Application:

Social Studies 11 and Social Justice 12 and English

The Essential Question: Why have farmworkers been termed “Canada’s Forgotten Workers?” and how do their working and living conditions compare to other working Canadians?

Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Focus questions for the vignette provide a short lesson option. (15 minutes)
2. Students will investigate the marginalization of farmworkers.
3. Activity for the application of higher order thinking concepts to personal narratives and the creation of a personal point of view statement.
4. Students will undertake a personal inquiry into the lives of farmworkers.
5. A simplified or classic jigsaw activity to promote engaging student discussion on the topic.

Learning Objectives

1. To be able to describe living and working conditions of farmworkers in British Columbia during the 1970s and 1980s.
2. To suggest and defend reasons for historical injustices in the struggle to gain better working conditions.
3. To compare and contrast the lives of farmworkers in the 1970s with those of modern farmworkers and “migrant workers.”
4. To conduct a deeper guided inquiry into one of the objectives listed above, or into a research question of their choice.

Materials and Resources Provided

- [“Farmworkers” Episode 3 Working People- A History of British Columbia](#)
- Appendix 1: Teaching Strategies
- Lesson Activity 1: Historical Context
- Lesson Activity 2: Perspectives and point of view
- Lesson Activity 3: Student Inquiry
- Lesson Activity 4: Jigsaw Activity and Discussion

Additional Suggested Materials

- [Raj Chouhan MLA for Burnaby Edmonds](#)
- Fraser Valley farmworkers and the Canadian Farmworkers’ Union. “Zindabad!” <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/intro.htm>
- Canadian Farm Workers Project at SFU <http://www.lib.sfu.ca/special-collections/canadian-farmworkers-union>

Vignette Questions

1. Which immigrant group made up the majority of BC farm workers in the 1970’s?
2. What examples were given as to how farm workers were exploited by their employers?
3. Raj Chouhan became the 1st president of what union in April 1980?
4. What working conditions were made public during the early years of the Canadian Farm Workers Union in the early 1980’s?
5. What happened in July 1981 when the Workers’ Compensation Board extended coverage to farm workers? How did the farm workers respond?
6. In what year did farm workers get health and safety standards extended to their work place?
7. What evidence can you cite to support the claim that Farm workers are Canada’s Forgotten workers?

Lesson Activities

1. Refer to Appendix 1 for more detailed lesson ideas. To extend the short lesson option, a reading outlining the historical context of Farmwork in BC can be followed by with the provided worksheet activity. (Lesson Activity 1) An additional lesson option provides an opportunity for students to develop empathy for farmworkers through a writing exercise or class discussion. (Lesson Activity 2)
2. Students can be given a choice of two inquiry questions. Students can proceed with research, consider the Farmworkers vignette, photographs, narratives, and suggested sources in this lesson before investigating their own sources. (Lesson Activity 3)
 - a. Inquiry Question 1: *“Farmworkers are Canada’s Forgotten Workers.” To what extent is this statement true?” Support or refute this statement with specific examples.*
 - b. Inquiry Question 2: *“What other workers in Canada appear as ignored or “forgotten?” Justify your position. Make specific references to the sources you selected.*
3. Students can use the provided quotations and photographs to explore a number of perspectives on farmwork in the Jigsaw activity detailed in Lesson Activity 4; a shortened version and an extended version are provided for in the instructions.

Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by Tony F. Arruda

Appendix 1: Teaching Strategies

Lesson: Farmworkers

Lesson Overviews

These lessons can be integrated into the study of post-World War II immigration in the Grade 11 Social Studies Curriculum, particularly under “Family Re-unification” and South Asian immigration. English teachers will see an opportunity for point of view or journal writing, or investigative reporting on the immigrant experience, alienation, and racism. Teachers have a choice of four tiered lessons. The first yields a basic understanding of farmworkers and their struggle as marginalized workers. The second lesson asks students to analyze narratives and create a point of view written product incorporating an understanding of “content” and “higher order thinking” concepts. The third lesson involves a student centred Inquiry in which students familiar with the Farmworkers vignette as well as the photographs and narratives in this lesson set extend that learning with their own questions. The fourth lesson offers teachers a choice of a simplified and classic jigsaw activity which can promote engaging classroom discussion.

The Lessons

The *first lesson* is designed as a basic lesson. Teachers begin with the Knowledge Networks vignette, “The Farmworkers, which examines the struggle facing many South Asian families working on farms in the BC’s Lower Mainland in the 1970s and 1980s. The reading, “The Farmworker in Historical Context” and the simple worksheet extends the focus of the video as students examine the unique work of farmworkers who laboured long hours for little pay. Students consider the factors in their exploitation including their recent arrival as immigrants, their lack of English language skills, as well as their exclusion from basic labour standards legislation leading to charges of “institutional racism.” Teachers might point out a few key aspects unique to farmworkers: the nature of their work (producing our food) which is undervalued by society in general; their historically low pay and hazardous working conditions; that the work has historically been exempted by major labour legislation (i.e. “piece work” rather than a legislated minimum wage).

The *second lesson* intends to stimulate historical empathy for farmworkers in general. Students should have completed lesson 1. In this lesson students analyze oppositional narratives from perspectives of farmworkers and farmers. They note the main viewpoints before offering their own in the form of either a newspaper article or simple organizer. While this is intended as an individual lesson for point of view writing, it can easily be modified for whole class discussion.

The *third lesson* is organized as an Inquiry into the lives of farmworkers as well as modern migrant workers. By definition, the inquiry is an act, a project demanding students ask their own questions, explore, gather, and analyze their own information and communicate their findings in a coherent, but not necessarily written, format. Students may respond with fact sheets, prose and poetry, persuasive essay or with more visual representations including photoessay, PowerPoint and Prezi. Two questions are provided as a guide but students are encouraged to develop their own Big Questions as they begin their research. Teacher discretion will apply to the amount of time that students will devote to this project. (Lesson Activity 3: Student Inquiry)

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

The *fourth lesson* is a (whole class) Jigsaw activity and discussion (Lesson Activity 4) involving image and narrative resources.

The following suggestions can be used by the teacher to facilitate a simple jigsaw activity or a more classic jigsaw activity for their class. After viewing the vignette and completing Lesson Activity 1 and/or Lesson Activity 2, divide the class into five groups. Assign each group a set of sources consisting of images and narrative as follow: (*Lesson Activity 4b*)

Group 1 analyzes Sources 1-3

Group 2 analyzes Sources 4-6

Group 3 analyzes Sources 7-9

Group 4 analyzes Sources 10-11

Group 5 analyzes Sources 12-13

The group's task is to examine the sources, summarize main ideas and facts, and provide the group's thoughts on the sources. ***The point is the group must draw their own conclusions from the sources.*** They may ***record*** these on a simple piece of paper, a poster, or in another medium suggested by the teacher. Each group will be asked to ***report findings*** to the entire class for discussion. Each student will listen to each group's presentation and record their findings on the worksheet, "The Farmworkers: Jigsaw Activity sheet" (*Lesson Activity sheet 4a*)

The teacher may wish to go further and undertake a classic "Jigsaw" with five "Expert" and "Learner" groups. In this case, each Expert group is assigned a set of sources which they analyze, discuss, and record group findings. As in the group activity outlined above, Expert group 1 will examine Sources 1-3, Expert group 2 will examine Sources 4-6, and so on. Once completed, each member of Expert group 1 moves to one of five locations in the class. Each of these "1s" forms the basis for "Learner" groups. The teacher then assigns an Expert from each of Expert groups 2, 3, 4, and 5 to join each student from Expert group 1 to form the new and complete "Learner group". Once everyone is in Learner groups, each Expert takes a turn reporting their findings to this group. Information can be recorded on "The Farmworkers: Jigsaw Activity sheet," which may provide the basis for a general classroom discussion later. This activity provides for 25 students.

(Note: both lessons three and 4 require teacher to make "Lesson Activity 4b: Images and Narratives available" to individuals and/or groups)

Lesson Activity 1: Historical Context

Lesson: Farmworkers

Reading: The Farmworker in Historical Context

The modern farmworker is unique not only when taking into account the importance of their work, the nature of their labour, and wage and working conditions but when we also consider the totality of their lifestyle. Their labour and the product of their labour (our food) are both arguably undervalued in Canada. What product could be more important in our lives? What labour could be more significant? Yet farmworkers labour for historically low pay, and often abysmal working and living conditions. Yet what do we know about them? Who or what is a “farmworker?” Exactly what work does he or she do? How do they make a living in the winter? Are farmworkers truly “Canada’s forgotten workers?”

Legally, a farmworker is someone who works in a farming, ranching, orchard, or agricultural operation. They are hired to help grow or pick crops, cultivate land, or raise animals, or do general work on a farm. They clean, size, grade, box, or package fruits, vegetables, or other crops. Farmworkers do not process food products, breed pets, work in forestry, aquaculture, or in a retail nursery, or work as a landscape gardener.

The modern farmworker movement (the attempt to organize themselves into unions) began in 1965 in California among Mexican-American workers. Thousands of these workers were arrested and many injured in the California Grape Strike of 1973 when grape growers attempted to crush the orchard workers attempts to unionize. The struggle is documented in the classic film, *Children in the Fields*, freely available online.

In British Columbia, many of farmworkers in Fraser Valley farms are Indo-Canadian. Their numbers grew from fewer than 500 in 1970 to 5,000 in 1978, and 28,000 workers in 1994. For much of this time, BC farmworkers laboured without most major laws that covered other forms of work. For example, they were not protected from by the Annual and General Holidays Act, Hours of Work Act, Employment Agencies Act, Factories Act, Maternity Protection Act, Payment of Wages Act, Truck Act, nor the Minimum Wage Act.

From the 1960s through the 1980s farmworkers in British Columbia struggled with poor wages and working conditions. They were paid “piece work”, for example, by weight (“by the pound or kilogram”), or by the crate, and without the safety net of a guaranteed Minimum Wage under the Employment Standards Act of BC. They toiled at back-breaking “unskilled” work in tough outdoor environment, sometimes without access to toilets or drinking water, characteristically labouring well beyond the eight hour day to come home to sometimes inadequate or shabby housing with poor sanitation. There were also complaints of unsafe transportation conditions. In 1997, a poorly equipped and overloaded vehicle commonly used to transporting farmworkers crashed near Abbotsford killing three workers. Add to that the historical fact most of the farmworkers of the Fraser Valley were Sikh immigrants from India, particularly

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

from the Punjab region, and we can understand them as largely excluded from much of the mainstream society they continue to serve. Throughout the 1970s farmworkers joined together to fight for the rights other BC workers enjoyed. The Canadian Farmworkers' Union was formed on April 6, 1980. Keep in mind most farmworkers were Sikhs who have a long history of resistance and fighting for rights.

Hearing of "migrant workers", non-Indigenous British Columbians might recall their own immigrant pasts when Italians, Greeks, and Portuguese, for example, sojourned to Canada as a "mission": to make money and return to the homeland. British Columbians might call to mind hundreds of thousands of Mexicans migrating routinely into California fields. Quite likely, we have heard the controversy of Chinese coal miners migrating into northern British Columbia because a mining company was unable to recruit Canadian miners. But how many of us consider the fact that Mexican workers migrate seasonally, not only into the United States, but into our own province? In 2011, for example, half of approximately 500 seasonal workers hired by a single employer, Coral Beach Farms, in Kelowna, B.C were from Mexico. Because of the number of injuries sustained by these workers, WorkSafe BC has initiated an awareness, injury claims, and safety program which is currently in place in twenty-nine Mexican provinces.

Despite gaining greater protection as workers, farmworker labour remains difficult. In 1993, occupational health and safety legislation began to protect farmworkers against the spraying of pesticides. For example, new regulations meant the law now demanded machinery be operated in a safe manner and that an adequate supply of drinking water is always available. A year later, the Canadian Farmworkers' Union Survey of 500 farmworkers illustrated the traditional dimensions of their labour. In 1994, of the 340 individuals who responded to the Survey, 88% worked in the Abbotsford area, 90% spoke Punjabi as their first language; and,

50% worked 9-10 hours on average

20% worked 13-14 hours on average

36% were not paid every two weeks in accordance with the law but at end of season

23% had no washroom facilities at their workplace

34% had no drinking water available

58% did not know where the First Aid kit was located

42% did not have a "basic knowledge of pesticides"

26% reported being sent into fields that had just been sprayed

64% were not aware of the Workers Compensation Board (now WorkSafe BC) which ensured workers were paid if injured in workplace accidents

Compiled by Tony Aruda

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

The Farmworker in Historical Context

Name: _____ Class: _____

Answer the questions after viewing the Farmworkers vignette and reading the article provided.

1. Who are the “farmworkers?” Include any observations you have made.

2. What is distinctive about their work? (for example, compare it to work in a store, restaurant, or factory)

3. List and explain any two negative aspects (ideas or facts) you encountered in the reading.

(aspect) _____

(explanation) _____

(aspect) _____

(explanation) _____

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

4. Why have farmworkers found it difficult to organize into unions?

According to the ***sources*** (refer to a specific source)...

In ***my opinion*** farmworkers have found it difficult to organize because...

5. Based on the reading and the viewing of the vignette; here is a question we could discuss further in class:

6. For further investigation: Individually, or as a class, go online to the Employment Standards Act of British Columbia and make a list of three regulations governing farm or agricultural workers in B.C. Then provide a short 100-150 word paragraph summing up on what you have discovered on this topic.

7. Vocabulary. You should be familiar with the following terms. Explain each in point form.

Farmworker

Working conditions

Piece work

Union movement

Migrant worker

Lesson: Farmworkers

Lesson Activity 2: Perspectives and Points of View

Read the following narratives (next page). Choose one of two questions to answer.

1. Your task is to assume the role of a reporter writing a 150-200 word opinion piece for your local newspaper. Your editor has told you that she wants the title to read: “Bitter Harvest.” In your story you should explain to Canadians why farmworkers pick a “bitter harvest.” Suggest two or three problems faced by farmworkers and offer at least one solution.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, prepare and complete an organizer (example below) which asks you to summarize various viewpoints in farmworker struggle (point form detail).

Farmworkers’ Viewpoints (list)

Farmers’ Viewpoints (list)

My viewpoint:

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

Narratives:

"Farmworkers are Canada's forgotten workers. They work in the fields and harvest the crops that feed us. They work in slave-like conditions for 12-14 hours a day and are paid piece rate. They travel in overcrowded buses to the fields or live in converted chicken coops. Many suffer chronic health problems because of exposure to pesticides during every working day." (*Canadian Farmworkers' Union spokesman Charan Gill, June, 1994*)

"This year we harvest strawberries, raspberries, apples and peaches - in years to come our people will harvest a different kind of harvest - a bitter harvest this time, a harvest of tumors and of birth defects, a harvest of sickness, a harvest of death. We work in the fields reaping two harvests, the sweet harvest that is found on your tables and the bitter harvest that is our daily life...We immigrants who till the soil and harvest the crops of Canada came to this country because we believed it would be a land of opportunity, justice and equality. We came here with great dreams. We have seen the seeds of those dreams grow into a bitter, bitter harvest. A harvest of poverty, a harvest of sickness, a harvest of death. "(*Raj Chouhan in a speech to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, Jan. 19, 1982*).

"There's no reason the union has to get militant or anything like that. We're all willing to improve conditions. But at the same time, we're not willing to lose that freedom by having a union on the farm and having one man dictate to you and having one man control all your labour. The way it works right now is a free-enterprise system where the farmers can hire whichever contractor they feel like or the contractor can go to whichever farm he wants and the people can work for any contractor they want. It's a very happy-go-lucky thing and if you're being mistreated some place, you can go to another one." (*Murray, a farmer who became president of the B.C Strawberry Growers' Association presents the farmers' viewpoint in the 1982 documentary film A Time to Rise.*)

Repeated studies have identified a high percentage of farmworkers' children accompanying their parents into the fields, sometimes to work, sometimes to play. Child labour, exposure to pesticides and the lack of accessible daycare have been prime targets of the CFU (*Zindabad! a History of the Canadian Farmworkers' Union*)

"These kids want all the protection of a working man - the compensation and the Unemployment Insurance. When I was a kid picking berries, I never got no gas allowance, no compensation, or anything like that. You don't need compensation to pick berries. I've never heard of anybody yet straining their back picking berries. It's not the best job in the world, but it's a good job for kids to learn how to work for somebody else." (*Farmer Martin Smith in the 1982 documentary A Time to Rise. Cited in Zindabad!*)

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

"Why is it that immigrants end up in low paying jobs on farms or in sweatshops? It is no accident. Why is it that many times these workers are excluded from even basic labour standards legislation? Why is it that even if they are covered with some legislation, it is not enforced? This is no accident. This is what I would call institutionalized forms of racism." (*CFU Organizer Sarwan Boal in a speech to the Montreal Farmworkers' Support Committee, December 1981, cited in Zindabad!*)

"English may be my second language," Boal said, "but I know the difference between Must and Should, Will and May. Whenever the proposal protects the rights of pesticide manufacturers or agribusiness, the wording says Must and Will. Whenever the proposal safeguards farmworkers, the wording says Should or May." (*Zindabad!*)

"Accidents caused by unsafe vehicles have continued. In 1991 a converted school bus carrying 18 farmworkers lost its rear axle and four wheels and flipped on the Alex Fraser Bridge. The crash sent 11 people to hospital. In 1992, a van carrying 18 farmworkers in Abbotsford blew a tire and flipped, landing near the Sumas River Bridge. All but one of the people in the van were injured, some with serious spinal and head injuries. Police at the scene said some of the workers would probably have drowned if the van had rolled into the river. On Nov. 4, 1994, three farmworkers were killed when the van they were being taken to work in crashed north of Hope. There were 16 people jammed into the van at the time and police said the investigation was hampered by difficulties in getting even basic information like the victims' names from the grower.

During the 1994 harvest season, the RCMP and the B.C. Motor Vehicle Branch set up roadblocks to check out vans and buses carrying farmworkers headed for strawberry fields. A Vancouver Sun columnist present reported that the van she saw stopped had holes in the floorboards, exhaust fumes where the passengers sat, a horn that didn't work and a loose battery as well as other problems. The van was towed away, leaving the farmworkers to wait by the side of the highway hoping to get picked up by the contractor. A representative from the labour ministry said that sometimes the contractors never show up. More than one third of the vehicles stopped and checked were condemned on the spot and towed away." (*Zindabad!*)

Lesson Activity 3: Student Inquiry

You have a choice of two Inquiry Questions or together, you and your teacher may pursue others. As you proceed with the research, consider the Farmworkers vignette, photographs, narratives, and suggested sources in this lesson before investigating your own sources. Your teacher will set out the minimum requirements including

- a. The format for completion of the assignment. For example, persuasive essay, photo essay, PowerPoint, Prezi, etc.

and
- b. The amount of time to devote to this project.

Inquiry Question 1:

“Farmworkers are Canada’s Forgotten Workers.” To what extent is this statement true?” Make specific references to the sources you selected.

Inquiry Question 2:

“What other workers in Canada appear as ignored or “forgotten?” Justify your position. Make specific references to the sources you selected.

Lesson: Farmworkers

Lesson Activity 4: Jigsaw Activity and Discussion

Jigsaw Activity 4a: Summarize the main facts, ideas, and your group's conclusions from your assigned sources in this organizer. This will be the foundation for a class discussion and/or other activities designated by your teacher.

Main Ideas/facts

Name: _____

Source 1: "Women and Children on the Farms"

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Source 2: "Unionizing: the point of view of the Farmworker"

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Source 3: "Hazards on the Farm"

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

Source 4: "From Home to Work"

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Source 5: "What about the Farmers?"

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

Our Conclusions: _____

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

Lesson Activity 4b: Images and Narratives for Inquiry and Jigsaw Activities

Group 1: "Women and Children on the Farms"

Source 1

Photograph by Jim McDowell, 1979

Readying flats of strawberries for weighing at a farm in the Fraser Valley.

"When people go to the store and buy strawberries they don't think about where those strawberries came from or about the people who provided them. For a few years in the early '80s we changed that attitude to a certain extent, but now it's back to Square One. My older daughter knows where the food comes from. She was practically born on the picket line and she was with me all the time. But my younger daughter just thinks that food comes from the supermarket." - *Former CFU President Raj Chouhan, 1995*



Figure 1 <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/mckim1.htm>



Figure 2 http://content.lib.sfu.ca/utis/getthumbnail/collection/cfu_2/id/0

Source 2

Photograph by Craig Berggold, 1983
Harvesting in fields near Aldergrove in early November.

"A group of shrewd men, usually resident in Canada for 10 or 15 years...became middlemen. They transported labour to the fields on behalf of the growers. Most of the farmworkers were new immigrants and became dependent on these labour contractors. The workers had no knowledge of the English

language and lacked the other skills necessary to successfully seek employment in a totally unfamiliar land. Farm work provided these workers some comfort because a majority of them came from the Punjab where they were used to working in open fields. Many felt isolated during the winter and some would work for meager wages in order to socialize with other folks from the Punjab. It must be noted that 75 per cent of farmworkers and 95 per cent of domestic workers are women." - *Author/activist Sadhu Binning, 1986*

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

Source 3

Photograph by Fred Wilson, 1980

Three young farmworkers stop work to pose at a Clearbrook farm. Pacific Tribune Photo

"Imagine the public outcry if it were determined that the children of the dominant white working-class majority were attending dangerous industrial work sites, such as construction or chemical manufacturing, because no childcare options were available to the parents. However, the children to which we refer are the children of people of colour who have immigrated to Canada in pursuit of work and a better life....Despite the fact that the children of farmworkers are subjected to dangerous conditions at the work sites, very little public debate has dealt with this important issue." - *Farmworkers and Their Children*, 1995



Figure 3 <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/trio2.htm>

"Today, in the absence of public scrutiny and the vigilance of the community, pesticide drums are dumped behind barns. The ministry of the environment employs a handful of inspectors, none of which are solely focused on the agriculture industry. Despite recent changes by the WCB to include the inspection of farm work sites, old machinery is stored haphazardly and creates an unsafe environment for children. Due to ignorance of the regulations, at times children accompany their parents to the fields before an appropriate no-entry period has lapsed. Because of the location of the work, childcare facilities are unavailable to farmworkers. In addition, most childcare would cost farmworkers more than they earn in a whole day." - *Farmworkers and Their Children*, 1995

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

GROUP 2: “Unionizing: the point of view of the Farmworker”

Source 4

Poster by Claire Kujundzic, 1987

This poster was designed to advertise a compilation cassette tape put together by Vancouver-area musicians in support of the farmworkers. The drawing also appears on T-shirts the union sells.

Who's feeding you?
What do you know about the people
who grow your food?
Who's feeding you?
Do they eat as well as you do?
Who's feeding you?
Do they share the wealth they produce?
They're treated like slaves,
All the time, 12-hour days,
Paid less than minimum wage,
Unite and fight, organize, Zindabad!

From Who's Feeding You, written by Julius Fisher and M. Allan, performed by Ginger Group, 1987



Figure 4 <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/talk.htm>

Source 5



Figure 5 <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/fwoc.htm>

Photographer Unknown, 1978
An early snapshot of the Farm Workers' Organizing Committee, the predecessor of the Canadian Farmworkers' Union.

"For the farmworkers, the achievement of a union will mean an end to the long history of being among the most underpaid and exploited section of Canadian workers, of being denied the status of workers, of being denied human dignity and of being able to carry on organized struggle for their rights as

workers. Working people can defend their rights only through their unions. By building their own union, the farmworkers will put an end to their past history and move forward to an era of struggling hand-in-hand with other organized sections of the Canadian workers. Not only will the union be able to phase out the labour contractor who is greatly responsible for the oppression of the farmworker, but it will enable the farmworker to wage successful struggles for legal protection and better working conditions." - FWOC press release, April, 1980

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

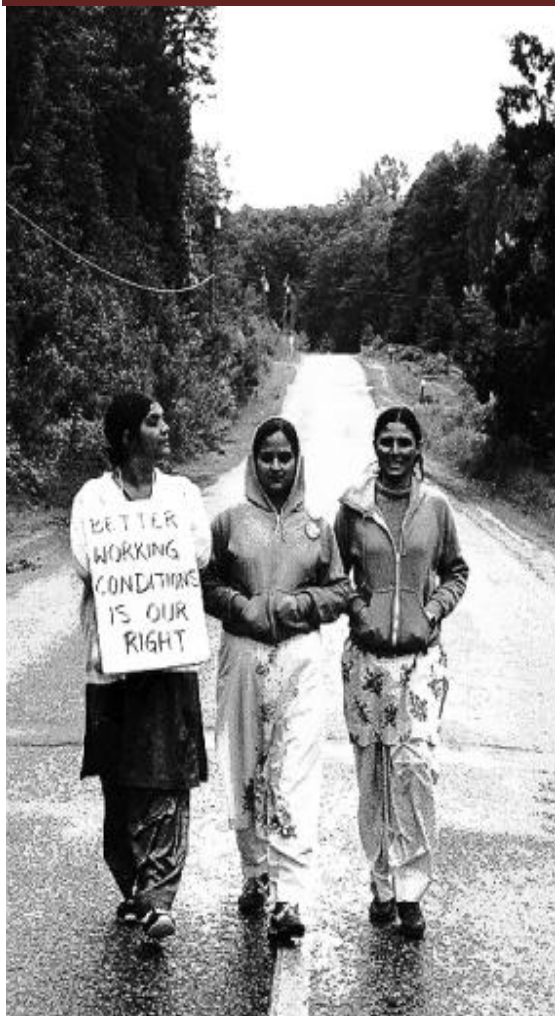


Figure 6 <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/road.htm>

SOURCE 6

Photograph by Craig Berggold, 1984

Hoss Farm worker Jasweer Kaur Brar (right) and colleagues on picket duty along the lonely road leading to the farm. Eleven women had been fired for backing the union.

"Working on my family's farm in India, I was my own boss. And because it was a family-owned farm, there was pride in the farm and in the work I did there. Here, I have no say and I'm taken advantage of. There is no respect for the work I do. I'm working for someone else and I'm subordinated by him. The employer is asking too much. He isn't respecting us very much. We were already working so hard - such long hours. That, combined with the loss of pride that I experienced coming from a family farm in the Punjab, made up my mind that I must do something." - Striker Jasweer Kaur Brar, 1984

"The 11 women brought their children with them to the picket line and for days shouts of 'Prani picker viposlo!' (All pickers back to work!) echoed down the long laneway to the Hoss Farm. Picketers were clapping, singing and chanting slogans: 'Canadian Farmworkers' Union - Zindabad!'" - *The Farmworker*, 1984

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

GROUP 3: "Hazards on the Farm"

Source 7



Figure 7 <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/deol.htm>

Photograph by Steve Bosch, 1981

Farmworkers in their "living quarters." Nineteen-year-old Jarnail Singh Deol (back row, centre) died of pesticide poisoning that the coroner's jury determined was preventable homicide and ruled that the Workers' Compensation Board should regulate pesticide use. The provincial government blocked the idea.

"Jarnail's death is no mere accident of fate. His death is a monument to government inaction. It is a statute to

'further study' an icon to 'the proper time.' To those who demand patience, to those who are tired of our voices shouting for equality, we say: No More Deaths! No more watching our young people die, our children being poisoned. Our children are as precious as yours - our young people are our future." - *CFU press release, 1982*

Labour Minister Bob McClelland says the assertion that the lack of government regulation contributed to Deol's death is "a ridiculous" conclusion. "The WCB cannot be even remotely blamed. Even if my decision was different about the way regulations would be handled in the farm workplace, it wouldn't have made any difference in this case," he told reporters. McClelland said "someone has been murdered by someone else. I think our society should be busy finding out who committed the crime." The angry minister did not even respond when asked whether "that someone might be the government in its failure to impose regulations." - *Vancouver Sun, March 17, 1983*

"We have lost a great deal by losing Jarnail. He was our support. Why should the government give a damn? Sons of Cabinet ministers don't spray pesticides." - *Jarnail's father Sadhu Singh Deol, 1983*

Working People: A History of Labour in BC



Figure 8 <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/toxic.htm>

Source 8

Photograph by Steve Bosch, 1981

A pesticide dispenser at the entrance to a farmer's field in the Fraser Valley.

"Our study shows a higher-than-normal ratio of farmworkers die from cancer of the liver, prostate and lymph glands. The study also shows an increase in leukemia and aplastic anemia among farmworkers and it is reasonable to assume the diseases

were caused by pesticides. Our report to the Workers' Compensation Board

recommends better equipment and more safety precautions for farmworkers exposed to pesticides - I doubt there will be changes without enforcement by the WCB." - Dr. Eric Young, B.C. Medical Association Environmental Health Committee Chairman, 1983

"While our organization is concerned about pesticide safety, we feel the (B.C. Medical Association's) report findings are overstated and unjustified. The public is overreacting. Educating farmers and workers is the answer, not more regulations" - B.C. Federation of Agriculture president George Aylard, 1982

"A voluntary system of pesticide safety would be like asking you to pay the government what taxes you think you owe." - West Coast Environmental Law Society lawyer Marilyn Kansky, 1983

"Farmworkers work in the one workplace in British Columbia that is regularly and systematically poisoned for the purpose of killing life. Insects, fungi and weeds are the target, but farmworkers are inevitably exposed to the killing agents." - CFU submission to the federal government, September, 1981

Source 9 (on the right)

Photograph by Craig Berggold, 1983

The first image from Berggold's art piece A True Story Health and Safety Regulations Now!

"I guess it's all in your point of view. But from this perspective something has got to change..." Port Coquitlam blueberry grower Vera Harvey agrees to stop using controversial (cancer-causing) fungicide Triforine on her crops, not to protect workers harvesting her crops or the people living nearby, but because she says she's tired of being phoned by people complaining about the spraying. "The only reason I'm stopping is to stop those kooks," she says. - Vancouver Sun, May 22, 1982



Figure 9

http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/ref/collection/cfu_2/id/169

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

GROUP 4: "From Home to Work"

Source 10



Photograph by Steve Bosch, 1981.

A farmworker stands outside her summer "home" during picking season in the Fraser Valley.

Figure 10 <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/bosch.htm>

"Farmworkers don't complain about their living conditions for fear of losing their jobs. The farmers are watching all the time and the government inspectors come only after receiving

a complaint and will often identify the complainant to the farmer. The farmer fires them the next day. As well, many of the camps are not recognizable living quarters from the outside, so the inspectors don't even know they exist. The chief building inspector says there are no serious problems with farm camps right now, but we estimate there are 1,500 farmworkers living in substandard conditions in the Fraser Valley." - CFU researcher David Lane, July, 1981

Source 11



Drawing by Shirley McGrew, 1986

One of a series of drawings made for teaching ESL classes. The series concentrates of farmworkers' lives and the benefits of the union.

"It's 5:00 and standing out on the sidewalk I can see the lights of the van grow brighter. It's only supposed to seat 15 people but there must be at least 25 and they still find space for my body. I can

barely squeeze onto the wooden bench with my knees crunched against my chest. I look at the elders' faces and can't tell if the stone look is fatigue or resignation; all the same they sit silently. The smell is awful; the contractor didn't bother to wash yesterday's vomit out of the van. I keep imagining what would happen if we had an accident. At least the driver gets to wear a seatbelt." - CFU undercover organizer, 1988

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

GROUP 5: “What about the Farmers?”

Source 12

"There's no reason the union has to get militant or anything like that. We're all willing to improve conditions. But at the same time, we're not willing to lose that freedom by having a union on the farm and having one man dictate to you and having one man control all your labour. The way it works right now is a free-enterprise system where the farmers can hire whichever contractor they feel like or the contractor can go to whichever farm he wants and the people can work for any contractor they want. It's a very happy-go-lucky thing and if you're being mistreated some place, you can go to another one." (*Murray, a farmer who became president of the B.C Strawberry Growers' Association presents the farmers' viewpoint in the 1982 documentary film A Time to Rise.*)

Source 13

"These kids want all the protection of a working man - the compensation and the Unemployment Insurance. When I was a kid picking berries, I never got no gas allowance, no compensation, or anything like that. You don't need compensation to pick berries. I've never heard of anybody yet straining their back picking berries. It's not the best job in the world, but it's a good job for kids to learn how to work for somebody else." *Farmer Martin Smith in the 1982 documentary A Time to Rise. Zindabad!*

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

4. ***Source Materials***

1. SFU Special Collection on the Canadian Farmworkers Union Project. Significant source for Inquiry. A selection of more than 700 publications, documents, photos, and other significant items from the complete CFU archival collection held by the SFU Library's Special Collection.

<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/special-collections/canadian-farmworkers-union>

Note: Photographs in CFUP above are readily accessed through this friendly link:

http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/search/collection/cfu_2/searchterm/photographs/field/all/mode/all/conn/and/order/title/ad/asc

Note: CFUP includes the very detailed and useful Canadian Farmworkers' Union Survey of 1994 (especially after page 23) illustrating wages and working conditions facing 340 farmworkers in the Fraser

Valley):http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/compoundobject/collection/cfu_2/id/5064/show/5042/rec/16

2. Another valuable online publication outlines the conditions faced by Fraser Valley farmworkers and the Canadian Farmworkers' Union. "Zindabad!" an emancipatory slogan meaning "long live" or to give "life to" and idea or person originated in India and Pakistan. See:<http://www.vcn.bc.ca/cfu/intro.htm>
3. WorkSafe BC 2008 Investigative Report on 1997 Van Crash killing 3 Farmworkers. Also see video simulation of Accident. Coroner's Inquest began 2009. See:
http://www.worksafebc.com/news_room/features/2009/new_120409.asp
4. CBC News Report on 2007 Abbotsford van crash describes ill-equipped, and overloaded vehicle commonly used to transport farmworkers. See comments by Jim Sinclair:
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/abbotsford-b-c-van-crash-sparks-calls-for-ban-1.697562>
5. WorkSafe BC. Scroll down to videos for advice for Agricultural Workers: tractor rollovers and pesticide dangers (in Punjabi for Sikh workers and Spanish for Mexican workers in BC):
<http://www2.worksafebc.com/Portals/Agriculture/SeasonalAgriculturalWorkerProgram.asp>
6. *A Time to Rise*. (1981) Award-winning film on the struggle to unionize farmworkers of BC. Cost of \$340 includes classroom rights. See:
<http://www.patwardhan.com/films/timetorise.htm>
7. Many online videos allow a deeper investigation of the farmworker struggle and provide an invaluable basis for student Inquiry. For example:

For the North American context, See "Fighting for our Lives," (part 1 of 6) in the *Children in the Fields* documentary of the 1973 California Grape Strike. Thousands are arrested and many injured as growers attempting to crush the workers' attempt to unionize.

Also see "Farmworker housing and working conditions – Youtube"

8. Mexican-based awareness training program for farmworkers in Okanagan and Fraser Valley. See WorkSafe Magazine, Sept/Oct 2011:
http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/newsletters/worksafe_magazine/Assets/PDF/wsm_Sep_Oct_2011.pdf