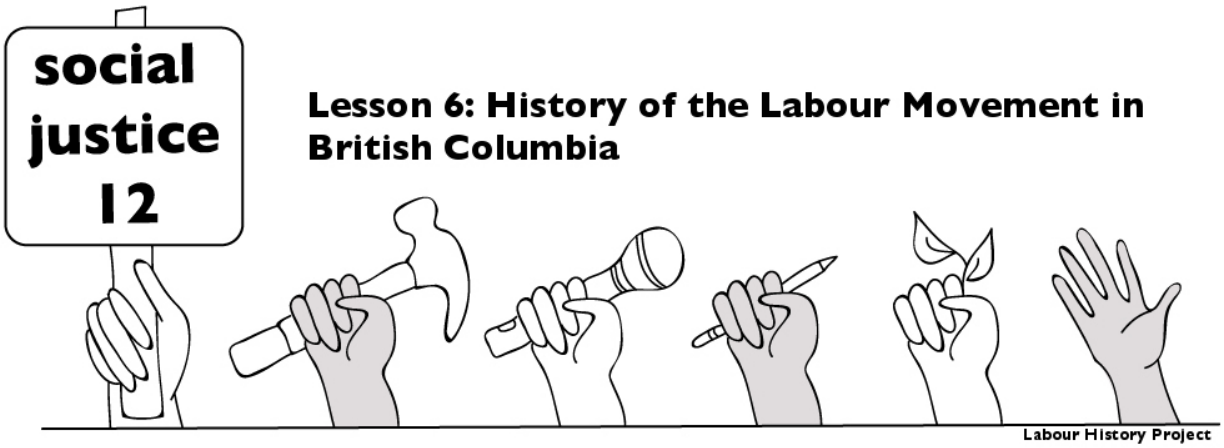

Lesson 6: History of the Labour Movement in British Columbia

Lesson Summary: Summary of the events and development of labour in B.C., includes suggested readings and documentaries.
Time: One to two periods
Essential Question: What were the challenges and contributions of the labour movement in shaping BC?

Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Class discussion/survey: Ask **"**which is more important: the minimum wage or the date of Confederation? Safety gear at work or the Rebellions of 1837/8? The 8 hour day or the first governor of the colony of BC?" Discuss why certain parts of the human story are given precedence in history books and classes.

2. Distribute **Handout 6a, "Questions from a worker who reads"** by Bertolt Brecht (1935). Have students discuss the questions in small groups and then as a class. As a class, discuss that the study of history has until recently only been interested in kings, politicians, businesses and wars. Yet most people are not kings and politicians, business owners (although we do the fighting in wars!). Consider why history books have not been interested in working people until quite recently.

3. Distribute **Handout 6b, "The Labour Movement in BC"**. Asses the best way to tackle the article depending on your class. You might break it up in groups, go over together, or have them read and work on the questions individually. Some of the vocabulary will be addressed in the article and some are at the end of the teacher package, but they may need to look a few up.

4. Go over the questions and vocabulary with students.

Learning Objectives

1. To understand the problems the labour movement faced and to appreciate the contribution it has made in shaping BC
2. To relate historical injustices to contemporary situations
3. To analyze specific examples of injustice in Canada related to characteristics such as worker rights
4. To -give examples of how public polices (e.g. labour relations, employment) promote or are detrimental to social justice

Materials and Resources Needed

- Handout 6A- Questions From A Worker Who Reads
- Handout 6b: The Labour Movement in British Columbia 1840-Present
- Adaptation: "These were the reasons"; stories of union organizing in BC, a film by Howie Smith from bcovertime.com

Backgrounders and Other Materials

None referenced

Extension Activities

1. Students work in groups to choose the most interesting events and create a time line of significant labour events
2. Students write short news stories from a worker perspective and place on the timeline
3. Students create their own modern version of the "Questions from a Worker Who Reads" using events from BC or Canadian history
4. Creative students might want to write an entirely new poem based on BC worker history or create a song, poster, video, or other artistic form of expression to show what they learned.
5. **Adaptation:**
   If possible, this lesson could be easily be adapted by viewing Howie Smith's "These were the reasons": stories of union organizing in BC" from bcovertime.com, and the reading could be assigned for homework.