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# the Labour History Association

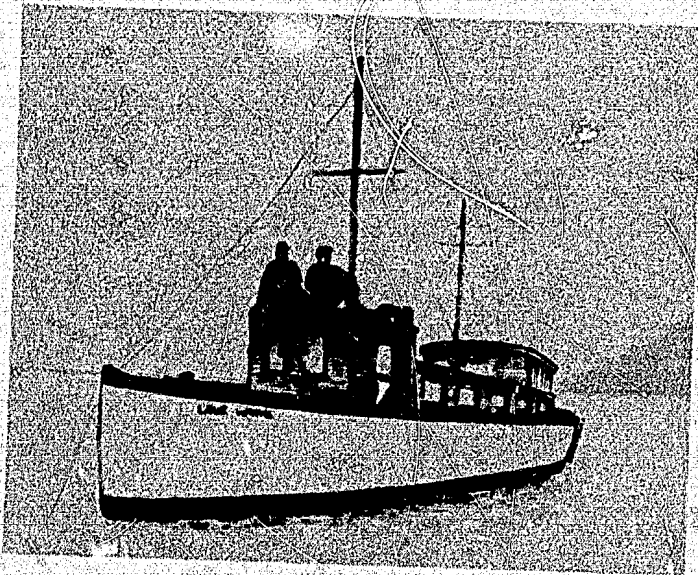


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**NEWSLETTER**

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*The MV Laur Wayne, former flagship of the Loggers' Navy, arrived back in port last week with Skipper McCuish reporting having hit one of the dirtiest North Easters in his six years of service with the IWA...The waves were piling in so high they were clearing the roof of the pilot house.*  
—B.C. Lumber Worker, 1941

**Teaching Local Working-Class History**  
**Frank Fuller**

## Teaching the Working-Class History of a British Columbia Coastal Community Using Local and Regional Resources

Frank Fuller

*This issue of the newsletter is intended as a supplement to our recent journal on logging and the IWA. Past President Frank Fuller gives practical suggestions for using materials included in the journal and for developing your own curriculum from the community.*

*Illustrations of the ships of the Loggers' Navy are by Janine Melillo. The Loggers' Navy was the ships that union organizers used to reach the workers in isolated camps along the coast.*

For too long, the youth in B.C. have gone forth to work in the woods, on the ferries, in the mills and mines, in fishing, and in white-collar jobs without any knowledge of the rich heritage of social and economic justice won for them by the men and women who occupied those work places in the past. Shop stewards, camp committees, grievance procedures, the eight-hour day, collective bargaining and, indeed, trade unions are now an accepted part of our society. The struggle that brought about that acceptability is a fundamental part of our heritage, which the educational curriculum has too long neglected. Units of working-class history at the local or regional level can redress this imbalance.

The purpose of this unit is to address this situation. The topic selected is the British Columbia loggers, their history, and their unions, the International Woodworkers of America (IWA).

The roots of the loggers' union go back to the early 1900s to earlier organizations such as the IWW and the B.C. Loggers' Union. Today, it has over 30,000 members working in Western Canada's woods and mills. Of these, some 5,000 belong to Loggers Local 1-71 and work along the entire B.C. coast—a coast that has been the setting for major events in their history, all virtually unknown to the present generation of loggers and students alike.

Discovering this history and introducing it into the

Socials 11 Canadian history curriculum required original research and meaningful teaching strategies that fit the needs of students in a B.C. coastal community.

The locale is Gibsons, B.C., a small village across Howe Sound from Vancouver. It is the home of a pulp mill, booming grounds, beachcombers, fishingboats, tow boats, and logging operations. The nearby Sechelt Indian Band, whose forebearers have worked along the coast for a thousand years, give a deeper dimension to the working-class base of the community. Jobs for students who leave the local secondary school extend from Howe Sound up the coast to the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Students are exposed to a variety of relevant experiences and perceptions on a regular basis in the community. For example, they have the almost daily visual observations of logging booms, barges, logging trucks, and equipment. In addition, Gibsons is the locale of the CBC TV program, "Beachcombers." Students have not only seen it, but many have had bit parts or been extras in the productions. There is also the annual summer Sea Cavalcade, which features tow-boat races and operational contests of dozers and sidewinders (specialized boats used in log booming grounds). Furthermore, students have daily conversations with parents, older brothers, and friends who work at logging. Their experiences make them aware of the possibility that many will work in the industry.

The students' knowledge of unions is good. Their opinions of them are varied and result from living in a strong trade-union community. Many parents and friends belong to unions, and some are local union officers and job stewards. A considerable number of students work at summer jobs and are cognizant of differences between union and non-union pay scales.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

With an awareness of the students' background of experience, I drew the following broad general learning outcome for the unit:

The students should be able to:

- Develop an understanding and cognitive knowledge of the loggers, their work, skills, history, and importance.
- Develop an understanding and cognitive knowledge of the role of the IWA Loggers Local—



- its origin, development, and role in the community and the province.
- c. Evaluate critically the effect of the logger and the union on the lives of people in the community and province.
  - d. Enlarge their present frame of reference to include a connection with the past struggles for human dignity by the loggers and an awareness of the connection of their struggle with the more favorable conditions in the industry today.

### RESOURCES

To pursue the goals outlined, it was necessary to complete preliminary research to locate resources and make them available to the students. The resources included both print and non-print materials, as well as the rich source of materials from the people who live and work in the community.

Most of the primary sources were located in the Special Collection Archives of the University of British Columbia Library, which houses an extensive collection of labour-related material. From microfilmed copies of the *B.C. Lumber Worker*, organ of the Woodworkers Union, copies were made of relevant articles, stories, reports, and editorials dating back to 1932. These are several columns, "Camp and Mill," featuring letters from loggers about camp conditions; a feature story, "The Saga of the Logger's Navy" by Al Parkin, a well-known labour editor and writer of the 1930s and 1940s. This is a fascinating tale of the crews of the loggers' boat and their efforts to organize logging camps in the remote inlets along the B.C. coast; regular reports of the Loggers' Navy crew to the membership on the organizing efforts; feature story, 1934 Vancouver Island Bloedel strike; a feature story on interesting logger personalities; the accounts of the memorable Queen Charlotte Island loggers' strike of 1944.

Secondary sources collected are numerous. Fortunately, there has been a veritable renaissance of coastal writers in recent years. Of special interest are those loggers or the sons and daughters of logger families who have become writers, poets, artists, or historians. They have devoted their talent and insights to the work, beauty, and struggles of both present and old-time loggers and other coastal workers.

For example, Howard White, who is the son of a logger, is an editor, writer, and publisher who lives

in nearby Madeira Park. He publishes the award-winning "Rain Coast Chronicles," a journal devoted to the history and culture of the B.C. coast. Gibsons' logger-poet Peter Trower has written sensitively of the dangers and uncertainties of a logger's life. Two of his books of poems, *Bush Poems* and *Between the Sky and the Splinters* are well liked by the students. Bus Griffiths, a Vancouver Island logger-artist, has recently published a pictorial novel, *Now You Are Logging*. His stories, depicted in comic-book style, but with minute attention to detail, give the student an otherwise unobtainable visual image and explanation of a logger's work as it was in the 1920s and 1930s—the topping and raising of spar trees, the falling and bucking of timber, and the moving of logs by truck down the mountain roads to be dumped into the water.

A new and more recent book is *Indians at Work* by Rolf Knight. This book, with its original and difficult research, details the role of Indian workers in B.C. from 1858 to 1930 and includes their roles as loggers and fishermen on the coast. Since a number of Indian workers from the nearby Sechelt Indian Band are members of the IWA, and a number of their sons and daughters attend the school, this book has become an important source.

One of the most useful and readable sources on the school library is *Tough Timber* by Myrtle Bergren. This is the story of early union organizing in B.C. It is based on interviews with the legendary early union men of the IWA who undertook the almost impossible job of organizing the loggers and sawmill workers on Vancouver Island and in the inlet camps of the B.C. coast. It also portrays vividly the role of wood workers' wives in the union's Ladies Auxiliary.

For the teacher and the more advanced students, there are well-researched studies of the IWA by students of the Simon Fraser University labour student program. Two other excellent sources on the IWA are found in a doctoral thesis by Dr. Jerry Lembcke and a master thesis by Bill Tatam, both at the University of Oregon.

The audio-visual sources uncovered are almost as numerous as the print sources. They include slide/tape presentations, audio productions, interviews, historical photos, and records.

Interesting and useful in a classroom is the work of the B.C. Overtime Educational Radio Productions



in Vancouver. Available commercially are the 25-minute cassette tapes, "The Loggers' Navy, the History of the IWA," and "Logging Camp Tales, an Interview with Al Parkin." The first features interviews with old-time union organizers, music, and commentary. The second features interesting and amusing accounts of old-time logger's personalities. The latter is also available in print form.

Also produced by B.C. Overtime for the B.C. Teachers' Federation Labour History Association is a 25-minute slide/tape show, "These Were the Reasons, A History of Union Organizing in B.C." This is widely used by both teachers and trade-union educators as an educational tool in the province. It features interviews, historical photos, music, and commentary, focussing on the primary industries, including logging.

The Vancouver Public Library has in recent years collected a wide assortment of historic photos related to the forest industry. Many of these photos have been reproduced on slides and organized into sets with accompanying written script. They are available commercially.

A taped interview with E. Dalskog, one of the early captains of the Loggers' Navy, is also used in class.

Gibsons and nearby areas are rich in community resources that are close at hand and available. They include:

- A local historical museum.
- The school library with numerous books and other materials on the forest industry.
- The local newspaper, with files dating back to the 1930s. The newspaper features stories, at frequent intervals, on logging. These include regular columns by a local secondary school teacher, George Matthews, who works as a logger in the summer.
- Many former students (near the present students' ages) who work on the booms and in the logging camps.
- Hundreds of older present-day and retired workers who have worked in the industry over the years.
- Indian families that have logged for generations.

The most valuable community resource was developed by the students themselves. The unit of study immediately preceding this one was on the depression in Canada. Students had an opportunity

to interview dozens of old timers who experienced that era. The interviews, on tape and written, are on file. This activity has given the students a sense of the value of oral history and in-depth knowledge of the community's past.

The strategies developed for this unit are intended to bring the students in contact with the resources and accomplish the learning outcome outlined. They give the students a chance to improve their basic skills of writing, reading, speaking, listening, and observing. In addition, they will have an opportunity to deepen and develop their ability to evaluate, interpret, and analyze real-life situations.

The unit is introduced by five lessons designed to involve as much sensory perception as possible. This allows the use of poetic imagery, visuals, tape interviews, dramatic audio presentations, letters, stories, and student reaction in small-group and full-class discussions. The purpose is to sharpen the students' existing perceptions, deepen their conceptual understanding, and enlarge their frames of reference.

#### LESSON OUTLINES

The following is a brief outline of the content of the five lessons. All except Lessons III and Lessons IV have been summarized because of space limitations. Lessons III and IV are given in more detail later.

##### LESSON I

The introductory lesson serves to introduce the student to the "way it was" in the forest industry in the years 1890 to 1940. About 15 slides selected from the sets produced by the Vancouver Public Library Historical Photo Section are presented. They show logging methods used in B.C. in the years between 1890 and 1940. These include hand logging, skids, oxen and horses, steam donkeys, railroads, high-lead logging, caterpillar tractors and trucks.

The success of this kind of introductory presentation depends on the careful selection of slides and the question techniques used by the teacher. The questions should involve the student as much as possible in relating their own experiences to the visual images of work presented.

##### LESSON II

The two objectives in this lesson that allow the students to make generalizations about loggers are:



1. To enable the student to identify, through poetic and artistic images, the skills of the loggers and their work.
2. To enable the student to make contact with old time loggers' attitudes toward the difficulties, dangers, and loneliness of logging-camp life.

The lesson used three resources: six poems from Peter Trower's *Bush Poems*, Bus Griffith's *This Was Logging*, and a local poet to assist in poetry reading and discussion. A glossary of logging terms is given as a handout.

The lesson is introduced through the reading of the poem "Running Scared with a Sky Hangar" followed by the students' reading and visualizing of Bus Griffith's artistic presentation of a young logger learning from an experienced logger, the difficult job of "topping and rigging" a spar tree (topic of the poem).

The ensuing discussion of the poetry and reading is led by the poet. The students then break into small groups, each to read one of the following poems that relate to the dangers and difficulties of the loggers' work:

Lowest Paid Job in the Wood (a whistle punk)  
Ballad of Booted Bondage (death of an old hook tender)  
The Last Hand Faller  
Like a War (seeing logging as a war)  
Ghost Camp (an abandoned logging camp)

The students were given page numbers of Bus Griffith's book that give visual images of the skills described. They are then asked to identify the skills used and to draw some conclusions about the loggers' attitudes toward their work as expressed in the poetry.

The student groups then report their findings to the full class, and the lesson is concluded by a full-class discussion of the questions. The generalizations made by the students about the loggers' skills, fears, pride, and fatalism are put on the blackboard. They are later to be compared with similar generalizations at the conclusion of Lesson III.

### LESSON III

#### Objectives

1. To provide students with the chance to read letters written by loggers in the 1930s about

their working conditions and desire for union organization.

2. To provide students with an oral and printed description of old-time logger personalities.
3. To give the students a chance to compare and contrast the attitude of the loggers in Trower's poem with those described by Parkin and expressed by loggers themselves.

#### Resources

1. An eight-minute interview with Al Parkin, "Logging Camp Tales."
2. Class sets of "Camp and Mill" column in the *B.C. Lumber Worker* in the 1930s (includes letters from loggers in camps).
3. Two loggers' songs from radio production, "Loggers' Navy" (relates to loggers' experience when they went into Vancouver).

#### Process

In Lesson II, the students had a chance to listen to, as well as to read and discuss, poems about the work and uncertainties of a loggers' life. They identified the logging skills described by poet Peter Trower. The purpose of Lesson III is to give students an opportunity to use primary sources—both audio and print—to make a direct connection with the men of the 1920s and 1930s. Al Parkin's interview uncovers the strength and richness of some of the characters; the letters reveal the working conditions of the camps; and the songs express some of the loneliness and frustration of men working in isolated camps year after year. The lesson also gives the students a chance to compare and contrast different attitudes of that time, as well as the wages and conditions of the past, with those of today.

#### Content

1. Brief review of generalization made in Lesson II.
2. Letters to "Logging Camp Tales."
3. Discussion questions:  
What were the characteristics of the personalities described that make them memorable? What were the differences between the attitudes of loggers who saw logging "as a war" and those described by Parkin?
4. Teacher gives a brief explanation of the role of the union in this period. In the camps, the union was able to maintain its ability to get wages increased and to improve conditions only through the loyalty of the men in the camps.
5. Students assigned to read the letters from different camps in the columns "Camp and Mill."
6. Discussion of reading to include these questions:



- What were the main concerns of the loggers?
  - What were the wages and conditions described by the loggers?
  - Were there differences between camps? Why do you think there were differences?
  - How did the wages and conditions compare with those of today? Why were union recognition and camp committees so important?
  - What were the loggers' expectations of their unions?
  - Were there any basic differences between the loggers' demands and those of the unemployed in the relief camps during the same period?
  - Were there differences in attitudes of these loggers toward their work as compared with those in Peter Trower's poem?
7. Two songs played from the B.C. Overtime production "Loggers' Navy." These are somewhat defiant ditties as to what happens to loggers from the camps when they hit town.
  8. Discussion of songs:
    - Why did some loggers drink and carouse when they hit town?
    - What were the complaints B.C. loggers made against employment agencies and the hotels on skid row in Vancouver?
    - Have there been any indications of women living in the camps? What effect would their absence have on the men's attitudes toward both women and family life?
    - Were loggers perhaps different from other people in their attitudes toward women and family life?
  9. Summary of lesson
- Focus on generalizations students have drawn about working conditions, loggers, and their attitudes toward work, unions and women.

#### LESSON IV

##### Objectives

1. To develop a chronology of events related to the loggers' efforts to organize and bargain with their employer.
2. To provide the students the opportunity to make a connection, through primary sources, with the early efforts of loggers' to change their working conditions and raise their quality of life.

##### Resources

"These Were the Reasons," "Saga of the Loggers' Navy," copies of *B.C. Lumber stories*—"The 1934

Bloedel Strike." "The 1944 Queen Charlotte Island Strike." The reports from the captains of the Loggers' Navy. Copies of *Vancouver Sun's* editorial reaction to union activity.

##### Process

This lesson takes two periods. The students see archival photos, listen to music, and hear the voices of old-time logger organizers giving their version of organization efforts, and bargaining successes and failures. The students and teacher construct a chronology of events in the full-class discussion. The chronology can be placed on the blackboard or on an overhead projector. Students will have an opportunity to compare and contrast the efforts of loggers with those of the relief camp workers of the same period. In the second half of the lesson the students, in small groups, will examine and react to primary sources related to these events and make generalizations about the outcomes.

##### Content

1. Review generalizations made in previous lesson and introduce and show the slide tape show.
2. Discussion questions:

- Why were the loggers and miners so determined to change their conditions of life between 1900 and 1940?
  - What was speedup and what effect did it have on the lives of loggers?
  - How did the wives of loggers assist their husbands in their efforts?
  - Was there any connection between the struggles of the loggers and those of the relief camp workers of the 1930s?
  - What led to the formation of the IWA as the union representing the loggers?
  - What provincial and federal laws were passed which aided the loggers in their efforts?
  - What were the high points of the loggers' organizing efforts during the 1930s and 1940s?
3. Small-group sessions

Each group read and discussed one of the printed sources. Discussion should focus on the following questions, each of which is related to one source.

- What were the accomplishments and mistakes of the 1934 Bloedel strike?
- What effect have the men of the Loggers' Navy had on the lives of the people who live and work on the B.C. Coast?
- What difficulties and problems faced the organizing captains of the Loggers' Navy? How did



they overcome them?

- What were the causes of the Queen Charlotte Island strike? What was the reaction of public opinion to a wartime strike? What long-range gains were made for all loggers?

#### 4. Full-class session:

Each group reports on results of their discussion. In the summary of this session, students are encouraged to make generalizations related to causes of early strikes, the long-range gains made and the loggers' mistakes and failures.

### LESSON V

The last lesson is a field trip to a nearby log booming ground. Its objective is to give the students the opportunity to talk to today's loggers and to evaluate their conditions and attitudes.

Before the trip, the students are given copies of a column from the Gibsons weekly newspaper. Written by George Matthews, a teacher, the article describes his experiences working in logging operations during the summers of 1977 and 1978 with former students. Arrangements are made for students to talk to a supervisor and a job steward about union/management relations. When possible, the students eat lunch with the boom men.

The instructor is trying to arrange additional supplements to this type of learning experience. One alternative would include an all-day boat trip up Jervis Inlet to visit abandoned camps from the 1930s. Also possible is a visit to the Vancouver Regional IWA Convention to observe loggers' delegates participating in making union policy.

The second part of the teaching strategies developed gives the students a chance to participate in the production of a booklet of local working-class history. It involves collective planning, interviews, art work, editing, and typing.

The students use the skills they have developed in the previous unit on the depression to talk to a wide variety of persons in the community involved in logging. These contacts focus on work experience, camp life, attitudes toward the union, the IWA, and present working conditions.

The following interviews, which were carried out by students in our community, are an example of the possibilities that exist in any community:

- A three- or four-generation logging family (there

are several on the coast).

- An interview with an Indian leader who was a high-lead logger in the 1930s and helped organize an IWA camp.
- Logging camp foreman and an operator.
- The present-day captain of the IWA Loggers' Navy, the *Green Gold*. The boat docks at the nearby Egmont marina.
- IWA job steward or union officers who live in the community.
- Wives of loggers who have lived in present-day camps.

When the interviews (usually about 20) are completed, the students read all interviews. Several committees are set up to produce a booklet. They are:

- A committee to edit the written interviews.
- A committee to complete some art work for the bulletin.
- A committee to write an introductory commentary.
- A committee to type stencils of the interviews.

Each student is given a final copy of the booklet. Copies are also made for the school library and the local historical museum.

This unit can be evaluated through a number of different techniques including both oral and written responses by students. Included in the student evaluation of the unit are assessments of:

- a. Resource materials used in the unit.
- b. The role of the loggers and their local union in the community, both in the past and in the present.
- c. The awareness of the past struggles of the loggers for human dignity.

Some students, at the beginning of this unit, expressed attitudes of disdain for the loggers' work. As one put it, "The only one who goes logging is a person who can't do anything else." However, this changed during the unit, and considerable respect was expressed in discussion. This change was perhaps the most striking evaluation of the unit. If this can be construed as a reflection of the unit's validity, then it is quite possible that the approach is transferable to other communities in Canada.

The mines of Sudbury and Cape Breton, the auto and steelworkers of Ontario, the railroaders, farm-

ers, and thousands of other ordinary working people have made a considerable contribution to the Canadian heritage. Their experiences are in the roots of the family histories of the individuals who live around neighborhood secondary schools.

Uncovering them can be a unique learning experience for both students and teachers.

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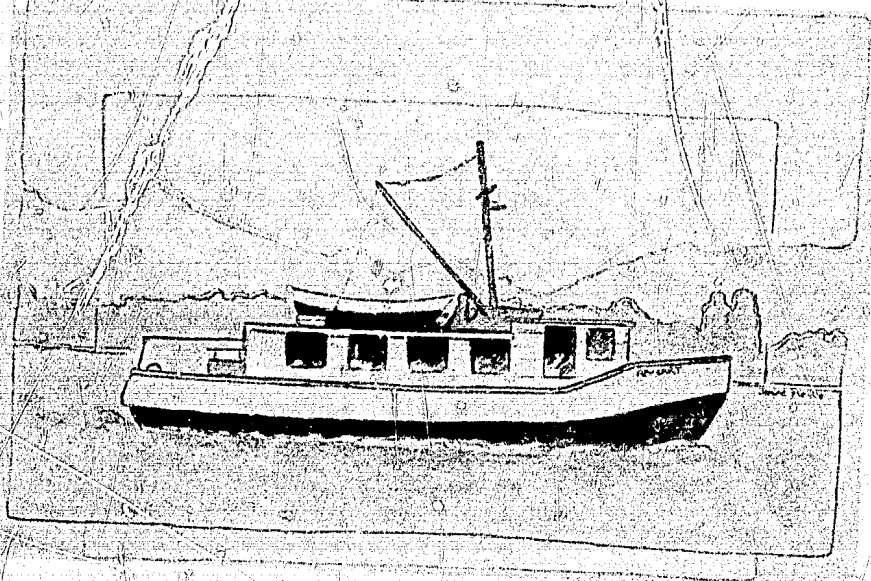
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Under the command of Ernie Dalskog, secretary of Local 71, IWA, the M.V. Annart, new addition to the "Navy," left Vancouver this week on her first cruise...

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