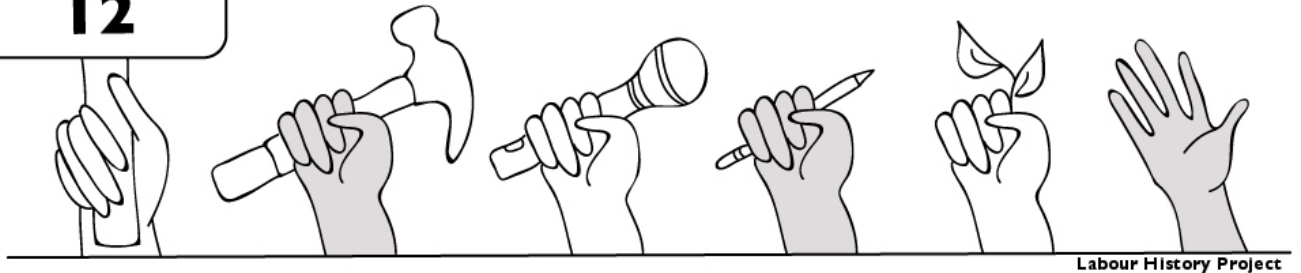


# social justice 12

## Lesson 8: Workers and the Law



**Lesson Summary:** Students connect human rights and workers rights, study key developments in workers and the government

**Time:** Two to three periods

**Essential Question:** Is government and the law a helpful way for achieving social justice?

### Activities

1. Ask students: What laws protect Canadian workers today? Students may refer to: Employment Standards Act, The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Human Rights Codes, WorkSafe BC
2. Ask: What types of protections do they have? Students may refer to: minimum wage, workplace hazards materials, right to refuse unsafe work, no discrimination
3. Ask students if the following questions are true or false:
  - We have child labour in BC. *(T) Children can work at 12 if a parent consents.*
  - Anyone can join a union in Canada if they want *(F) Farmworkers, RCMP cannot.*
  - Men and women earn about the same wage in Canada *(F) Because of social and economic factors, women still earn around 70cents on the dollar compared to men on average. "Gender gap"*
  - Police can have unions in Canada *(T and F) RCMP cannot, municipal forces can.*
4. Review definition of social justice. How might workers rights relate to that definition? (Refer to Glossary at the end of this unit)
5. Important legal events in social justice-discussion. Ask students: What laws protect human rights in Canada and the world? What are some examples of human rights? (Free speech, freedom of religion, voting rights, equality rights, freedom of association, etc)

6. Brainstorm: what are some important events in human rights development in Canada or the world?

7. Review activity. Distribute **Handout #8a Timeline of Human Rights and the Law in Canada**

*Option A:* distribute the handout with only dates provided. Copy and cut the events and have students match the events to the dates in groups by placing then gluing the correct event to the appropriate date.

*Option B:* distribute the timeline key and have them work in groups to answer the questions.

8. After students have completed the human rights timeline, ask student to name some key events in the development of workers' rights. They may or may not know any. They may remember the Winnipeg General Strike or On to Ottawa Trek. Discuss why we don't know these events as well.

9. Distribute **Handout #8 b: Timeline of Workers Rights and the Law in Canada**. Students can work in small groups or individually as homework to examine the (extensive) list of cases and events related to workers and the law. For each event, students decide if it is a victory or loss for workers rights. Remind them the law includes: laws passed by government, police enforcement of the laws, public policy.

10. After completion of timeline, discuss their findings. Go over discussion questions and review. The big question is: has the law helped or hindered workers in Canada?

11. Obtain and distribute a copy of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the UNDHR, and BC Human Rights code. What sections protect workers? What kinds of rights are missing? How does the Charter compare to the UNDHR and the ILO's definition of workers' rights? **Handout #8c: Worker's Human Rights Laws**

Distribute **Handout #8d: FDR's Economic Bill of Rights**. This is from a speech by popular American president in 1944 on the State of the Union. He died before it could be introduced. Michael Moore found and publicized the speech in his film "Capitalism: A Love Story". Have students examine the Bill of Rights and discuss their thoughts.

12. Students could then work individually or in small groups to create their own "Workers Bill of Rights". These could be posted in the classroom.

### Learning Objectives

Students will develop an understanding and appreciation that:

That workers rights are human rights

That adequate protections in the workplace can mean the difference between a decent standard of living and poverty for many families.

That the right of workers to act collectively for their interests is an important and pressing issue in Canada and the world, recognized by Canadian and international law.

## Specific Social Justice Prescribed Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

Analyse the roles played by legislation, the courts, public policy, and other forms of government in promoting or failing to promote social justice in Canada

Describe limitations on the scope of the human rights legislation including application of the Charter to government, not private individuals and classes that are not fully protected

Give examples of legislative provisions and government policies that contribute to social injustice (e.g. exemption of certain occupations in employment laws such as migrant labourers, child labourers, and farm labourers)

Give examples of how public policy (e.g. related to labour relations, employment) promotes or is detrimental to the achievement of social justice

### Materials and Resources Needed

Handout #8a Timeline of Human Rights and the Law in Canada

Glue sticks if Option A chosen

Handout #8 b: Timeline of Workers Rights and the Law in Canada

Handout #8c: Worker's Human Rights Laws

Handout #8d: FDR's Economic Bill of Rights

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms at <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/Charter/>

BC Human Rights Code "Protection from Discrimination" Information sheet. At <http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/human-rights-protection/>

### Extension Activities

Students research the cases provided in the timeline and present to the class in a seminar

Students research a few chosen laws, and write a report or thesis on: "To what extent is the government and law a good way to achieve social justice for working people in Canada"

Students visit a human rights website such as Amnesty International and summarize one or more cases of international abuse of human rights against labour activists.

Students debate or discuss the merit of including economic rights in the Charter (for example, minimum wage or hours of work). If they wish, they could contact their MPs to lobby for a change in that direction.

Students investigate the laws that cover their own workplace and determine the extent to which the law is followed. For example, students are often unaware of the BC Employment Standards Act

and its provisions for lunch, coffee breaks, split shifts, etc.) What are the enforcement measures available?