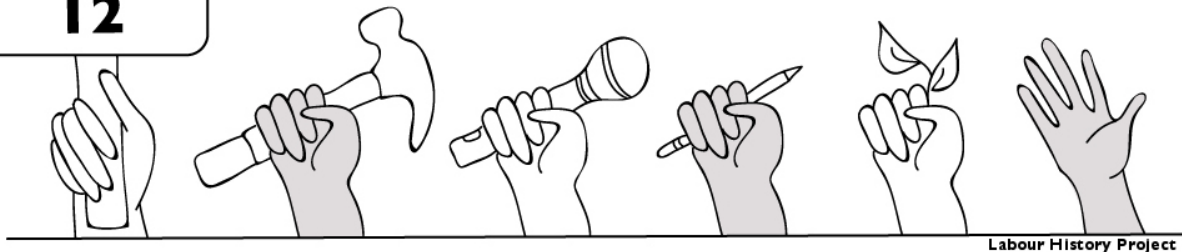




## Lesson 7: Case Study of the Big Strike, 1912-1914



Labour History Project

**Lesson Summary:** Case Study of the Big Strike with analysis of a strike considering the role of workplace health and safety, race and gender, the power of government and law. Includes research project for students and culminating seminar.

**Time:** Three to five classes depending on the nature of the class

**Essential Question:** What rights do workers have in pursuing their interests?

### Lesson Activities

#### 1. Pose discussion questions to the class:

What protections do you have on the job? What safety protections do you have?

What if you think those rules have been broken? What can you do?

Would you feel comfortable exerting those rights? Why/why not?

If you have a job, do you think your co-workers would support you if you exercised your rights?

Your family?

What divides you and your co-workers on the job? Who has power at your work?

What can workers do as individuals? As a group?

#### 2. Introduction to The Big Strike

Check what students know about the dangers of coal mining by discussing what they remember about coal mining from Grade 9 socials or other classes.

#### Instruction/Background readings

Provide the basics of the Big Strike

Refer to handout: **Handout #1 The Big Strike: Background Readings**

Students can take notes on the causes, events, and outcome of The Big Strike and then go over as a class.

### 3. Big Strike Case Study: Multiple Perspectives

After discussing the strike overall, divide into four groups to cover sources from different groups of people during the Big Strike . (This could be made into more groups by dividing some of the articles in a particular group). Provide relevant sections of **Handout #2: The Big Strike student readings** to the appropriate groups. Have students **read and then summarize the main points** in the articles to share in a class discussion. This is not a formal question sheet, but have them point out the main ideas.

Readings:

Group one: songs, oral histories, and secondary sources about the experiences of strikers

Group two: stories of women and families during the strike

Group three: biography of James Dunsmuir, typical mine owner of the time and former owner of Vancouver Island mines

Group four: stories of workers divided, mostly about the role of race to divide workers.

After they have summarized and discussed the main ideas of their articles, provide the **Handout #3 Big Strike seminar questions** to answer after the discussion. The focus is on identifying multiple perspectives, power relationships, different injustices, and ways to address injustice. Have them work in pairs or small groups, then discuss as a class.

### 4. Student Case studies: Other Workers Fight Back

After reflecting on the case study of the Big Strike, students can work in small groups or on their own to research other labour case studies to prepare for a class seminar on issues related to work and injustice. These cases have been selected to represent a variety of local or thematic issues that a teacher could select based on student engagement but are by no means prescriptive. Provide a copy of **Handout #7d:Case study: workers fight back**. Students research their cases.

### 5. SEMINAR DISCUSSION: Workers Fight Back

After students have researched their cases and answered the seminar questions, the class can hold a seminar style discussion. Each group is responsible for summarizing the case they researched and the results of their analysis.

Other class members can listen, discuss, and ask questions. The idea is the class can consider the different methods people used to respond to a case of injustice, the kinds of things that can divide people, and how it is important to go beyond those divisions and act collectively.

### **A. 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.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR ASSESSMENT:**

Collect students' compiled research in a formal report

Assess students' contribution to discussion

Journal reflection: is it more effective to act as individuals or as a collective? What forces have divided us in the past? Do they still divide us today?

## **Learning Objectives**

### **Objectives:**

Students will use historical and contemporary case studies that have complex and overlapping social themes. The lesson begins with a look at the Vancouver Island strike of 1912-14.

Students analyze forces that united and divided working people in the coal mining communities on Vancouver Island. Then students will research other historical or contemporary labour case studies to share in a final seminar-style discussion.

1. To apply critical thinking skills to a range of social justice issues, situations, and topics
2. To analyze causes of social injustice
3. To analyze specific examples of injustice in Canada related to characteristics such as age, marital or family status, race and ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic status.
4. To assess the contributions of particular individuals and groups who are identified with struggles for social justice
5. To analyze the roles played by legislation, the courts, public policy, and other forms of government action in promoting or failing to promote social justice
6. To assess various methods and models of promoting social justice

### **Materials and Resources Needed**

- Handout #7a The Big Strike: Background Readings
- Handout #7b Big Strike student readings
- Handout #7c Big Strike seminar questions
- Handout #7d Case study: workers fight back
- Access to internet and/or library

### **Backgrounders and Other Materials**

- None beyond those specified under materials

## **Extension: Film Case Studies**

### **MATEWAN**

The teacher may want to obtain a copy of the film Matewan, directed by John Sayles. It covers the case in Mingo-Logan county of a mining town facing labour strife and has many similar themes of race, family, and the role of business and government. Students could be asked to compare and reflect on this case compared to the Big Strike.

### **A TIME TO RISE**

This powerful NFB film follows the efforts of mostly Indo-Canadian but also white and Chinese in BC's Fraser Valley to organize a union. There are many elements of overlap with the role of race, sex, age, class, etc.

### **VIVA LA CAUSA**

Another powerful film following the efforts of mostly Mexican and also Filipino farmworkers in California led by the social justice icon Cesar Chavez, and the different strategies employed. Also brings in elements of race in particular but also the role of police and government.