



### By Women, For Women

**Film Summary:** In the 1970s, more women entered into the workforce and sought ways to become organized. One union that formed in British Columbia—the Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada—is the subject of this film. Students gain an appreciation of women's issues in the workplace in the 1970s—and learn more about an attempt to organize a union in the banks by the independent union SORWUC--through a simulation of a union organizing drive.

#### Curriculum

**Application:** Social Studies 10, Social Studies 11, Social Justice 12

**The Essential Question:** How did the rights of working women in Canada develop as more women entered the workforce in the 1970s?

### Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Focus questions for the vignette provides a short lesson option. ( 15 minutes)
2. Class activities provide for additional information and learning about the struggle women faced in the Canada workforce during the 1970s.
3. Students explore the struggles and the inequities that women face in the Canadian workforce at the time of the rise of Feminism in the 1970s.
4. A student activity provides for a lesson to simulate the organization of a union.

### Learning Standards

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the role of women, work and social changes in the 1970s. (continuity and change)
2. Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their significance at particular times and places, and from group to group (significance)
3. Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups at particular times and places (continuity and change)
4. Assess how underlying conditions and the actions of individuals or groups influence events, decisions, or developments, and analyze multiple consequences (cause and consequence)

### Materials and Resources Provided

- [“By Women, For Women” Episode 3- Working People-A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- Appendix 1: Teaching Strategies
- Appendix 2: Fact sheet
- Lesson Activity 1: Simulation Organizer
- Lesson Activity 2: Union Organizer Kits

### Additional Suggested Materials

- [These were the reasons...Chapter 7 Fighting for Equity: the '30's, the War years and a Shoreworker's story](#)
- [Graphic History Collective - Project #8: An Entirely Different Kind of Labour Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada](#)
- See additional lessons at [TeachBC](#) that focus on working women: Trouble on the Line, Helena Gutteridge, Margaret Rutledge, The Professionals, Home Front, Work Front, Bea Zucco and Connie Jervis.
- [On the Line](#), pages 199-204

### Vignette Questions

1. As more working women in Canada entered the workforce, what types of jobs and working conditions did they experience?
2. Why were most working women NOT in unions?
3. What were the challenges facing women organizing unions in the banks?
4. Why did the attempt to organize bank workers in BC fail?
5. What are the positive outcomes of the bank drive?

### Lesson Activities

1. This lesson is intended to be taught in a Social Studies 11 unit, as part of the chapter on the 1970s decade and rise of the feminist movement; or Social Justice 12 (women and trade union issues).
2. A short lesson option of 20-30 minutes would involve the viewing of the vignette and a discussion of the vignette questions.
3. Teaching Strategies (*Appendix 1*) outlines how a full lesson can be spent on examining the labour facts in “Women in the Workforce “ (*Appendix 2*) prior to watching the vignette and then following up the viewing with the provide class discussion questions to guide the activity.
4. An additional activity that simulates the challenges in forming a union is provided in *Appendix 1, the Lesson Part Two*. A Union Organizer Package (*Lesson Lesson Activity 2*) and an organizing worksheet (*Lesson Activity 1*) are provided.

Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by Janet Nicol

## Appendix 1: Teaching Strategies

## Lesson: For Women, By Women

### Overview

This lesson is intended to be taught in a Social Studies 11 unit, as part of the chapter on the 1970s decade and rise of the feminist movement; or Social Justice 12 (women and trade union issues).

### Introduction

The teacher can begin the class with a brief introduction of the topic of trade unions; their growth over the twentieth century in Canada primarily among male workers, with a male leadership—until the 1970s, when feminists—and other marginalised workers-- began challenging their exclusion from many institutions, including unions.

### The Lesson-Part One

Distribute a copy of Appendix 2 “Labour Facts about Women in the Workforce” in the 1970s.” As students look over the statistics discuss: Why were most women in low-paid, ‘pink collar ghettos’? Why were most working women not in unions?

As more women entered the workforce in the 1970s, changes began to happen. Then play the video vignette “For Women, By Women.”

After the video the teacher should explain that when bank workers in BC conducted a union organizing drive through the Service, Office and Retail Workers Union (SORWUC) there were many challenges, and eventually the union had to give up the 24 unionised bank branches without gaining a union contract.

Initiate a discussion with the class.

*Possible questions and prompts:*

- *Why do you think the bank drive failed?*
- *Why do you think trade unions have not organized women workers in the past?*
- *Are there low-paid workers in ‘ghettoised’ jobs in Canada today who would benefit by being in unions?*
- *What are the risks—and benefits of union membership?*

## The Lesson- Part two: Union Organization Simulation

The teacher explains that the class is going to conduct a simulation of a union organizing drive in a typical workplace where the workers make low-pay, have little say over their working conditions and few benefits.

The teacher will play the role of the workplace manager, trying to keep the union out. The students are the workers. The students will form groups of four and one person in the group will be designated the union organizer. The goal of the union organizer is to convince the other three students, within a time limit, to join the union by signing a union card. The union card is provided on the last page of Lesson Activity 2 in duplicate; photocopy enough of the cards to distribute to each of the students in your class.

*Teaching suggestion: It may be advantageous for the students selected to be the union organizers to have the package of leaflets to read in advance so they that can make better use of the resources to persuade the other students to join the union.*

The teacher can explain in advance of the activity, the consequences if a majority sign up “in real life”: The organizers are able to apply to the Labour Relations Board for a union certification. Once legally certified, workers can form a negotiating committee and bargain with their boss for a union contract. This means they can bargain for higher wages, better benefits and other workplace issues. Remember—as the video shows – employers, such as the banks, don’t always co-operate and this whole process can be very challenging for workers.

Enclosed in this lesson plan package are ‘Union Organizer Kits’ (Lesson Activity 2) containing actual information leaflets used during the SORWUC bank drive and union cards. After students break into groups of four, distribute one kit per group, to the designated union organizer. All students (including the organizer) receive a worksheet (Lesson Activity 1) to record their thoughts on the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of a union in the workplace.

The teacher (who is the anti-union “manager”) can make a short speech about how unions are not a good idea: higher wages mean higher prices for the consumer, workers have to pay union dues, workers could go on strike, workers have to do what the union tells them and unions are out of date. (2-3 minutes)

Within each group, the organizer can hand out the leaflets for the group members to read. (10-15 minutes)

Next, the organizer can begin to try to convince others to join a union. While discussing, each student will make notes on the worksheet chart. (15-20 minutes)

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

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### **Closure and lesson summary:**

The teacher ends the discussion after a two-minute warning. One organizer goes around the room and collects union cards of those students who have agreed to join. The organizer counts the cards and either declares the union drive to have succeeded (50% plus 1)—or failed.

Class discussion on the activity: Why did the union drive succeed? ...or fail? Encourage students to continue making notes on their chart (arguments “for” and against” unions) as this is discussed as a class.

What are some of the risks of organizing a union? What are some of the benefits? Are there long-term benefits when workers try to organize, even if they fail—as happened to BC bank workers in the 1970s?

### **Assessment suggestions:**

1. Students can write two paragraphs on why they would—or would not—join a union—and why. Students should include in the assignment information from the simulation exercise. Students can also attach the worksheet notes (with at least five points on either side of the ledger) to the assignment.

and/or

2. Homework assignment – Using the internet, research a union organizing drive in Canada or another country within the last two years. Make notes about the union drive’s success or failure and impact.

In the next class, in groups of four, be prepared to share your findings. You will submit a brief summary of your findings and those of your three classmates in paragraph format for assessment.

**Appendix 2: Fact sheet**

**Lesson: For Women, by Women**

**Labour Facts about Women in the Workforce in the 1970s**

- Between 1965 and 1975, the number of women in Canada's workforce increased seventy-nine percent
- Most women were confined to low-wage jobs such as retail, service and clerical work
- Women in the 1970s were paid half the wages of men for doing the same work—or work of the same value
- Of the 250,000 women workers in BC in the 1970s—only 1 out of 5 was in a union
- Women in unions made \$100 to \$400 a month more than non-union women workers
- The “big five” Canadian banks employed 145,000 people in the 1970s — and about three-quarters (72%) were women
- Few daycares were available (and were costly) for working mothers
- Women were often “passed over” for promotion in favor of men
- Women workers had fewer benefits than men, including pensions, protection against harassment and job security
- in 1972 a small group of working women in Vancouver formed an independent trade union, called Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC) and began organizing women workers

\*SORWUC signed up a majority of workers in 24 bank branches across BC in 1976 but had many difficulties and eventually folded—but made history organizing one of the toughest industries

*Compiled by J. Nicol*

**Lesson: For Women, By Women**

**Lesson Activity 1- Worksheet**

**To Join—or not to join—a trade union?**

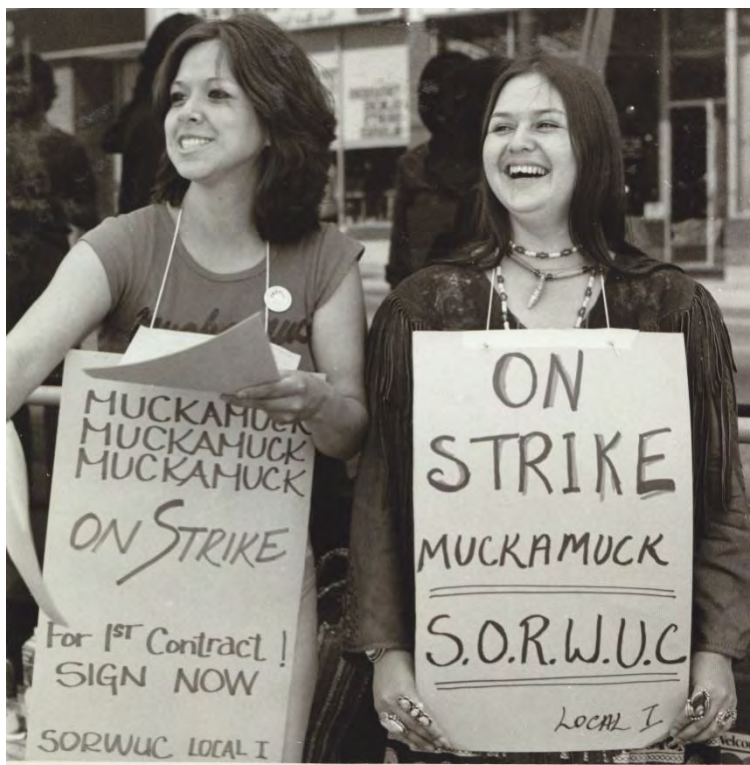
*Fill in as many points as possible, based on group and class discussion.*

Reasons for joining a union	Reasons against joining a union



Lesson: For Women, By Women

Lesson Activity 2- Union Organizer Kits



1. SORWUC-two-women-with-signs-ca1975-NIS.jpg



2. SORWUC-March-ca1970s-NIS.jpg

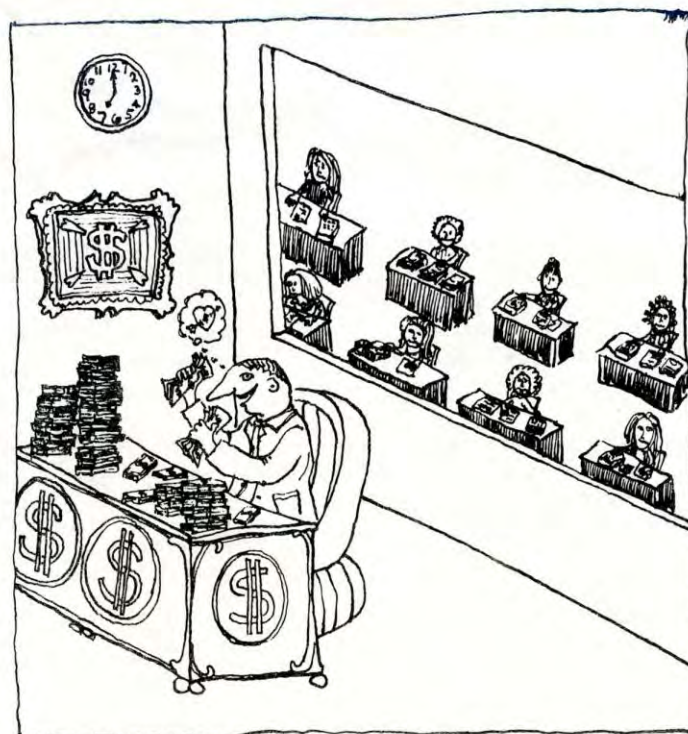


**STEP ONE:**

**Victory Square,  
Bank of Commerce  
Employees Join Union**

ON AUGUST 16, 1976, THE EMPLOYEES AT THE VICTORY SQUARE BRANCH OF THE CANADIAN IMPERIAL BANK OF COMMERCE IN VANCOUVER APPLIED FOR UNION CERTIFICATION.

We make some of the lowest wages in the work force and the bank seems to have no intention of changing that situation until they are forced to. When we are unionized the bank will be required by law to negotiate with us.



University of British Columbia Rare Books and Special Collections, SORWUC fonds

# is your paycheque a secret?



"... and of course we don't discuss salaries ..."

So ends the usual job interview.

BUT WHY NOT?

There are reasons the boss doesn't want us to talk about wages:

\* The woman at the next desk, who does the same job, is paid \$100/month more or \$100/month less.

So long as we don't discuss wages, we can't even know of this injustice, let alone do anything about it.

\* All of us are underpaid. We earn from \$100 to \$400 less per month than women union members who do the same jobs. Very few of us earn enough to support families, though many of us must.

The boss wants us to act as individuals, not as a group. If we started discussing wages together, we might start doing something about it - together. When we go in one at a time to ask for a raise, it's one individual against the whole company. But if we all got together and demanded a raise, we'd have some power.

The Service, Office & Retail Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC) was formed with the understanding that working women just can't "get ahead" as individuals. We need each other. We need to organize, to act together, to win better wages and working conditions, respect for our skills and equality in the work force.

For more information, send this form to SORWUC,  
3484 Oxford Street, Vancouver, or phone 298-8430.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Workplace \_\_\_\_\_

(all replies in strictest confidence)



## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

How much  
overtime  
do you do?



Many office workers regularly stay an hour or half-hour after work. Often overtime is not paid if it is less than an hour. And even at time-and-a-half rates, is it worth it? Overtime cuts into your leisure time - time you could spend relaxing.

"Even half an hour after work completely ruins my evening," says one office worker. "By the time I get dinner made and the dishes done and the kids in bed, it's 10 o'clock and I haven't even read the paper."

Another secretary says, "It doesn't seem to occur to my boss that I might have something better to do with my time."

"I worked eleven hours overtime one week and had to take two days off sick - that doesn't make sense."

"I figured out that I got \$10 clear for 3 hours of overtime - only \$3.30 an hour. It's not worth it."

"When so many people are unemployed, no one should be working overtime. They should hire more staff."

OVERTIME - what can you do about it? One of the things women in our union have been demanding is double-time pay for overtime, the right to refuse to work overtime, and triple-time pay for working on weekends. Not to mention wages good enough so that we don't need to work overtime to make ends meet.

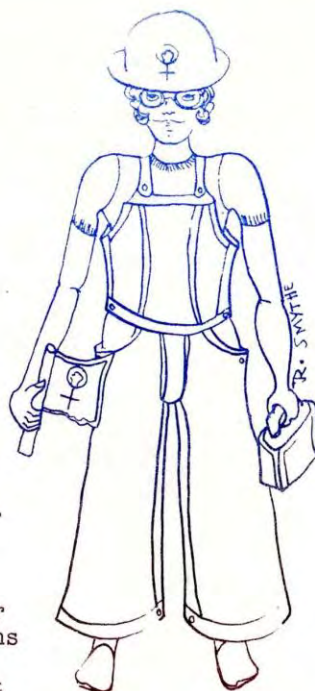
SORWUC (Service, Office & Retail Workers Union of Canada) is an independent union formed by working women in Vancouver. For further information, write us at 3484 Oxford Street, Vancouver, or phone Jean at 298-8430.

University of British Columbia Rare Books and Special Collections, SORWUC fonds

BUT WON'T WE  
HAVE TO PUNCH A  
TIMECLOCK ?

As office workers, we tend to think that unions are for other people - factory workers, construction workers, generally men, with quite different working conditions than we have.

In fact, where office workers have unionized, their union contracts not only improve their wages, but also improve relations between employees and make working conditions more pleasant and relaxed.



### IF YOU UNIONIZE ...

- \* Each employee knows she is paid according to the work she does. No longer does one employee look suspiciously at another wondering who gets paid more and why.
- \* Each employee knows she can't be fired without just cause, and would have a chance to defend herself through the grievance procedure. This makes everyone more relaxed.
- \* The employees together negotiate for wages, at a set time every year or so. It's not just the person who demands a raise who gets it. This removes a major source of tension from the office. We don't have to wonder "would this be a good time to ask for a raise?" And the boss doesn't have to deal with the question of raises all year long.



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**Working  
in  
department  
stores**

come and talk about it...  
Tuesday, Sept. 5, 7pm  
Vancouver Public Library,  
Rm. 307 (Robson and  
Burrard)

On Tuesday, Sept. 5, 7 pm at the Library, the Working Women's Association is having a monthly general meeting. The theme of this meeting will be working in department stores. Two of our members who have worked in department stores will talk about their research on Eaton's. Afterwards, we would like to have a discussion with other department store workers. Some of the items to be discussed are:

1. Department stores' policy of hiring part-time and temporary workers, rather than full-time workers, and paying these workers much less than they pay full-time workers.
2. Job security — non-existent in department stores.

For further information, call the Working Women's Association, Rm. 3, 45 Kingsway, 872-1824.



3. Secret paychecks — we have managed to find out what some salesclerks earnings are from The Bay and Eaton's.

4. Difficulties involved in attempting to unionize in department stores.

We hope as many of you as possible will take this opportunity to tell us about your job situation on Tuesday. Everyone is welcome.



Workers Union of Canada  
Application for Membership Form

I, the undersigned, hereby make application for membership in the  
**Workers Union of Canada**, Local 1.

My signature certifies that I have paid the prescribed initiation fee, and that as a member of this Organization, I will comply with the Constitution, Aims, Principles and Policies of the Union and that I wish the above named organization to represent me as a bargaining representative.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Employed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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