



# LONG AND HARD

Since the earliest days of Canada's story, people have worked to make sure they and their families had what they needed.

**F**or thousands of years, work and life were the same thing. Indigenous people hunted, fished and trapped animals for food, clothing and more. Depending on where they lived, they might have gathered nuts and berries to eat, leaves and roots for medicine, and grown crops such as beans and corn. Everyone in the family had a job to do, whether it was sewing clothes from animal skins, putting up a tipi or igloo, keeping the fire going or many other jobs. While people helped each other out, they didn't work for pay.

**BIG CHANGE:**

**NEWCOMERS BRING NEW WAYS.**

**S**tarting in the 1500s, fishermen who worked for companies in Spain, England and France sailed to the waters off what is now Canada's east coast. Some of them stayed for a time on land, while some went back and forth to Europe. In the 1600s, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company started hiring French-Canadians and First Nations people to buy, sell, trade and transport furs.

More settlers came from France, Scotland, England, Ireland and other countries in Europe. They farmed or fished, working long hours every day, all year long. Their families grew or made most of what they needed.

Some newcomers started businesses or worked for others: shopkeepers, doctors, government workers, restaurant owners and teachers, for example. They often lived in towns and cities. Craftspeople made and sold things like saddles, barrels, boots, wheels, iron tools, bricks and more.

As some people grew wealthier, they paid others to build their houses and furniture. Richer people could hire servants to cook and clean, look after their horses, care for their gardens and do other tasks. For these hired people, the day started before the homeowners awoke and ended after they went to bed, with perhaps half a day per week off.

In the mid-1800s, people started moving to bigger towns and cities. New factories needed workers, and lots of them. People were also needed to work in mines, lay railway tracks, or put up ever-larger buildings.

## **BIG CHANGE:**

# **WORK STARTS MOVING FROM THE FAMILY TO THE FACTORY.**

Settlers from Ontario at what is now downtown Winnipeg, 1872



Glenbow Museum

## **NINE HOURS, PLEASE**

In 1872, Toronto printers used to working 11 or 12 hours every day demanded change in what's known as the Nine Hours Movement. (The modern work day is usually 7.5 or 8 hours.) The strike lasted from late March to mid-May, and in June, the federal government made unions legal.



**O**nce people left the country and moved to the city, they had to take whatever work they could get to earn money. And while many business owners treated their workers fairly, others paid workers badly, and did nothing about loud, dangerous workplaces that could be fiercely hot in summer and cruelly cold in winter. Anyone who complained was fired.

Around the world, workers were starting to realize that while on their own they were helpless, if they got together, they had the power to make changes. Starting in the late 1870s, workers created groups called unions.



Workers at a textile factory in London, Ont., early 1900s

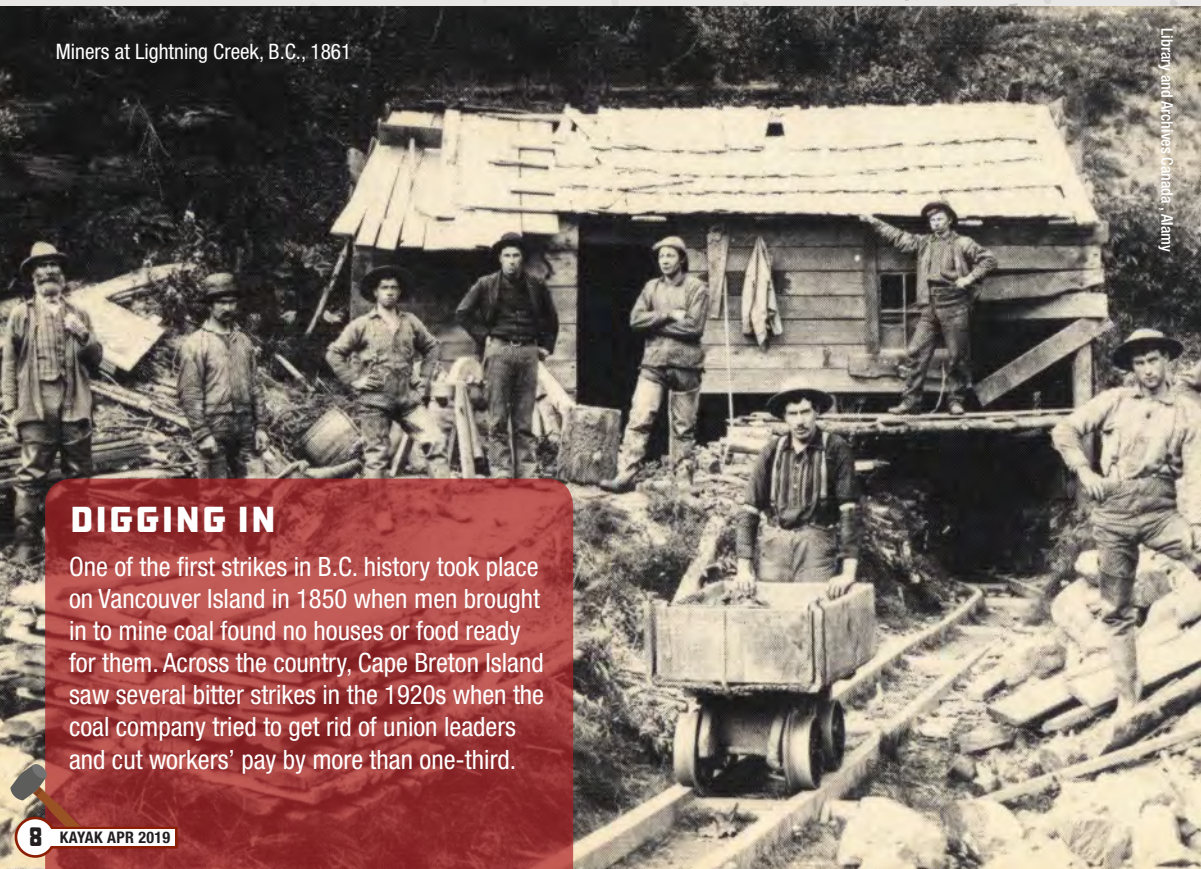
## BIG CHANGE:

# UNIONS FORM TO HELP WORKERS.

**U**nions helped win better pay and working conditions even for Canadians who weren't part of a union. Employers who didn't want to lose workers matched many of those improvements.

Federal government workers won the right to form unions in 1967. Some are not allowed to go on strike because what they do is so important — think of prison guards or airport security.

Miners at Lightning Creek, B.C., 1861



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## DIGGING IN

One of the first strikes in B.C. history took place on Vancouver Island in 1850 when men brought in to mine coal found no houses or food ready for them. Across the country, Cape Breton Island saw several bitter strikes in the 1920s when the coal company tried to get rid of union leaders and cut workers' pay by more than one-third.

## ONLY A WORKING GIRL

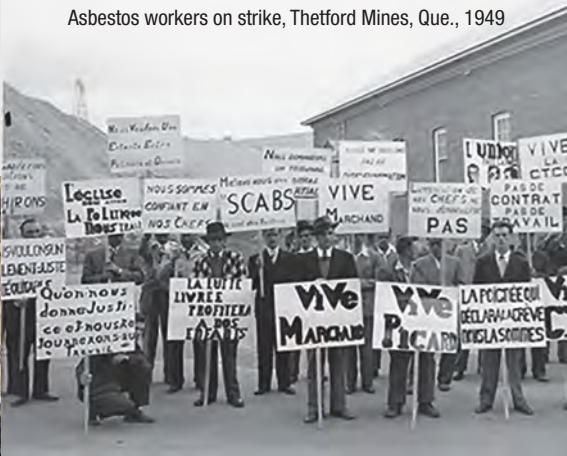
Marie Jouvassaye, originally from Belleville, Ont., moved to Toronto and by 1893 was president of the Working Girls' Union. She also helped create the Working Women's Protective Association for many female servants. She later moved to the Yukon and British Columbia, and wrote two books of poetry. Here is the first verse of her most famous poem, "Only a Working Girl."

I know I am only a working girl,  
And I am not ashamed to say  
I belong to the ranks of those who toil  
For a living, day by day.  
With willing feet I press along  
In the paths that I must tread,  
Proud that I have the strength and skill  
To earn my daily bread.

## NOT FOR EVERYONE

Early unions were formed almost entirely by white men. Very few allowed women, Indigenous workers or people of colour. Today, anyone can be a member of the union if their workplace has one.

Asbestos workers on strike, Thetford Mines, Que., 1949



## MAKING HISTORY IN QUEBEC

Asbestos miners in Quebec walked off the job at three different sites on Feb. 14, 1949. The company owners had refused to increase their pay. The workers also wanted protection because so many of them were getting sick from breathing in tiny bits of cancer-causing asbestos. Even though the provincial government supported the companies, and there was violence on both sides, most Quebecers and many Roman Catholic priests supported the strikers. The strike dragged on for months, finally ending in July.

## BIG CHANGE: APPS, GIGS AND...?

In recent years, many companies have started giving workers contracts for a few months at a time instead of hiring them as employees. Other companies give people work now and then but don't guarantee anything. Food delivery, private drivers, web-based work from home and other new types of work are known as "gigs." The future of work in Canada already looks very different from its past.

