



Activity 6

Immigrant and Migrant Labour Issues in Canada

Summary of Issues and Learning Outcomes

Lesson Outcome

Students will examine the issues surrounding the need for and use of immigrant and migrant labour in Canadian industries.

Inquiry Questions

To what extent is migrant/immigrant labour needed in Canada and Alberta?
Should Canada allow foreign workers to work in Canadian industries?
To what extent is migrant/immigrant labour a positive aspect of globalization?

Values and Attitudes Outcomes

- 2.2 exhibit a global consciousness with respect to the human condition
- 3.2 recognize and appreciate impacts of globalization on the interdependent relationships among people, the economy and the environment

Knowledge and Understanding Outcomes

- 3.6 analyze political and economic challenges and opportunities of globalization (trade liberalization, foreign investment, economic growth, privatization, outsourcing, knowledge economy)
- 4.1 recognize and appreciate the impact of globalization on the quality of life of individuals and communities
- 4.2 recognize and appreciate the importance of human rights in determining quality of life
- 4.8 analyze how globalization affects individuals and communities (migration, technology, agricultural issues, pandemics, resource issues, contemporary issues)

Key Skills

- S 1.3 assess the validity of information based on context, bias, sources, objectivity, evidence or reliability
- S 1.5 evaluate personal assumptions and opinions to develop an expanded appreciation of a topic or an issue
- S 1.7 evaluate the logic of assumptions underlying a position
- S 8.2 use skills of formal and informal discussion and/or debate to persuasively express informed viewpoints on an issue.
- S 8.4 listen respectfully to others.



Activity Overview

This activity examines the issue of migrant and immigrant labour in Canada and Alberta. Through a critical analysis of a documentary film and an Alberta Federation of Labour policy statement, students will gain insight into the experiences of immigrant and migrant workers in contemporary Alberta. Determine which format you are going to have your students use to complete the lesson: horseshoe debate, 4-corner debate, fishbowl debate, talk show format, or panel discussion.

Key Concepts

- employment issues of globalization; agricultural issues of globalization
- exploitation
- labour rights; labour legislation
- worker health and safety
- migrant workers; immigrant workers; refugee workers; temporary foreign workers; guest workers; illegal immigrant workers
- non-unionized workers; unionized workers
- collective bargaining; trade unions; labour unions; international labour unions; strikes; strikebreaking; union busting
- International Labour Organization (ILO); Global Compact
- consumer boycotts

Objectives/Rationale

Alberta's Social Studies 10-1 Program requires students to explore labour issues of economic globalization and to examine the relationship between globalization and human rights. This activity will examine one of the most controversial trends in Canada within present-day economic globalization: the practice of importing labour to work in Canadian industries. The activity will also explore how a perspective on economic globalization may be influenced by a multitude of forces of which reduced labour costs are a major one but lack of a supply of workers in Canada may be another. This lesson will help students to fulfill these requirements while they develop inquiry, communication and problem-solving skills while developing in-depth knowledge and understanding about the issue of the use of non-Canadian workers in various industries in Canada.

Resources

- *El Contrato*, NFB. 2003. (51 minutes). This documentary from Min Sook Lee follows a poverty-stricken father from Central Mexico, along with several of his countrymen, as they make their annual migration to southern Ontario to pick tomatoes. For 8 months a year, the town's population absorbs 4,000 migrant workers who toil under conditions, and for wages, that no local would accept. Yet despite a fear of repercussions, the workers voice their desire for dignity and respect.

http://www.nfb.ca/film/el_contrato

Time:

- 2 periods

Preparation:

- Check [El Contrato](#) live-stream link and preview film or obtain cartoons for activity opener. See Resources list
- Obtain and preview the documentary film [24 Days in Brooks](#)
- Photocopy Activity Master 6.1 for the film [24 Days in Brooks](#)
- Chart paper
- Photocopy **Activity Master 6.2: AFL Policy Statement on Temporary Foreign Workers** and Sandra Elgersma's government report **Temporary Foreign Workers: Benefits and Concerns**



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Resources cont.

- Editorial cartoons related to immigrant/migrant workers

Select two or more cartoons or photos to use as an opener for the classroom activity. Sample cartoon links are provided below.

- Cartoon by M.e.Cohen

Posted 3/28/2006

<http://www.humorink.com/cartoons/archives/2006/03/1214/>

- Cartoon by Pat Bagley - Salt Lake Tribune

Posted 3/20/2006

www.politicalcartoons.com/cartoon/c9cd20ea-8b5e-4fd0-ae6f-0b45ed3d8ea8.html

- Additional cartoons can be found by searching with the keywords “migrant” and “immigration” on the web sites listed below.

<http://www.humorink.com/cartoons/archives/2006/03/1214/>

www.politicalcartoons.com/cartoon/c9cd20ea-8b5e-4fd0-ae6f-0b45ed3d8ea8.html

- Migrant worker program ‘exploitative,’ researchers warn by Shanon Proudfoot, Canwest News Service April 27, 2010

<http://www2.canada.com/story.html?id=2955228>

- 24 Days in Brooks (documentary film)

This NFB documentary examines a strike among mostly immigrant and refugee workers in Canada’s largest meatpacking plant (the Lakeside Packers Plant in Brooks, Alberta). It also depicts the formation of a union in this plant. The documentary examines the economic and social impacts of a community that has experienced tremendous change since 1995 because of Lakeside’s efforts to attract immigrants and refugees to Brooks. The film also explores the experiences and vulnerabilities of immigrant/refugee workers in Canada. The documentary predicts that the impacts of migrant labourers on Canada will only become more profound over time. This film may be purchased from the NFB or live-streamed from the NFB website:

http://www.nfb.ca/film/24_days_in_brooks

- **Activity Master 6.2:** AFL Policy Statement on Temporary Foreign Workers (press release)

The Alberta Federation of Labour released this document in May 2006. It examines labour issues related to Canada’s controversial Temporary Foreign Worker Program. As this document maintains, temporary foreign workers in Canada are far more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than immigrant or refugee workers. Other documents are available on the AFL web site at:

http://www.afl.org/under_campaigns_regarding_temporary_foreign_workers

- Temporary Foreign Workers: Benefits and Concerns by Sandra Elgersma (federal government report)

This report by the Government of Canada provides a defence of Canada’s Temporary Foreign Workers Program while recognizing some of the objections to the program. The report is available on the Internet at:

<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/prb0711-e.htm#canada>



Instructional Strategies

1. Open the lesson by showing students the 51-minute video El Contrato. NFB. 2003. Through a class discussion, encourage students to identify the basic issues in this controversial topic and record a summary on chart paper or the white board. In addition, invite students to identify two or more sides on each issue and briefly list them on the same chart paper. Post the results for future use.
2. Distribute **Activity Master 6.1** and introduce students to the assignment. Students should be encouraged to fill-in as much of the assignment as possible during their viewing of the documentary film.
3. Show the documentary film 24 Days in Brooks (42 minutes). Be prepared to stop it at strategic points to allow the students to record answers to the worksheet questions.
4. Classroom discussion of 24 Days in Brooks and of the section of **Activity Master 6.1: Part A**.
5. Distribute **Activity Master 6.2 AFL Policy Statement on Temporary Foreign Workers** and the article Temporary Foreign Workers: Benefits and Concerns by Sandra Elgersma. Students are instructed to complete the remainder of **Activity Master 6.1: Part A and B** for homework using these resources.
6. Once this has been completed and reviewed or assessed by the teacher, use the directions found in the link below to prepare and enact a horseshoe or u-shaped discussion.
http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/sssm/html/u-shapeddiscussion_sm.html
7. This means that in a horseshoe debate students will be invited to take a position (seat) in the horseshoe based upon their personal beliefs on this issue. Invite those on each extreme to explain their reasoning for placing themselves where they did.
8. The rest of the class is to listen to the opening discussion and then seat themselves in the horseshoe.
9. Following another discussion, invite those who wish to change locations to do so.

Follow Up

- Do you know of any other areas in Alberta where migrant labour may be heavily used?
- Should those jobs be filled by Alberta workers first, then Canadian workers and finally out of country workers?
- How would you feel as an unemployed Albertan if someone from another country took a job you were capable of doing?
- Have the students transfer to their essay preparation notes any appropriate material from this activity.

Differentiated Learning

- Other readings may be used to replace or supplement those provided here. Two recommended readings are:
 - 1) Jennifer Heggland's "Come, work, leave: Temporary foreign workers in Canada" Citizens for Public Justice, 10 March 2008:
www.cpj.ca/en/content/come-work-leave-temporary-foreign-workers-canada



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Differentiated Learning cont.

- 2) Carol Goar's "No way to treat a guest worker" Toronto Star, Apr 13, 2007: www.thestar.com/article/202587
 - Show appropriate scenes from the movie Fast Food Nation or another film instead of 24 Days in Brooks.

Metacognition ◦ Did you find that you changed or altered your position on one or more of the issues? If you did, what caused the changes?

Assessment ◦ Homework check **Activity Master 6.1: Part A and B** (holistic scoring is recommended).

◦ Ask the student to indicate and reflect upon where they placed themselves in the horseshoe debate and explain why they did or did not move, providing factual support.

◦ The LearnAlberta.ca site contains a number of rubrics in the Support Material section to be used to evaluate activities of the type suggested here. Teachers should determine the weight to be given this activity and select rubrics appropriately.

http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/sssm/html/u-shapeddiscussion_sm.html



ACTIVITY MASTER 6.1:
Part A: 24 Days in Brooks



Instructions: Use the documentary film 24 Days in Brooks to complete the following exercises as thoroughly as possible in the space provided.

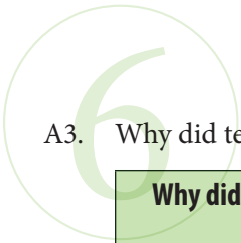
A1. Why are immigrant and refugee workers flooding into Brooks, Alberta?

Why did the Lakeside Packers Meat-packing Plant (of Brooks) actively recruit immigrant and refugee labour?	What attracts immigrants and refugee workers to Brooks?

A2. What challenges and opportunities have emerged from the massive influx of immigrants and refugees to Brooks?

Challenges	Opportunities





A3. Why did tensions erupt in Brooks at Lakeside Packers in 2006?

Why did immigrant and refugee workers at Lakeside Packers go on strike in 2006? Why did they pursue unionization in 2006?	Why did some employees of Lakeside Packers oppose the 2006 strike and drive for unionization?

A4. What benefits and drawbacks of contemporary economic globalization are revealed in the documentary film 24 Days in Brooks?

Benefits of Economic Globalization	Drawbacks of Economic Globalization



ACTIVITY MASTER 6.1:

Part B: The Foreign Temporary Worker Program



Instructions: Use the attached two readings on Canada's Foreign Temporary Worker Program to complete the following exercises as thoroughly as possible in the space provided.

B1. Why did Canada create the Foreign Temporary Worker Program?

B2. Why is the Alberta Federation of Labour opposed to the Foreign Temporary Worker Program? Provide as many reasons as possible for this opposition.

B3. According to the Alberta Federation of Labour, why are foreign temporary workers much more vulnerable to exploitation than other workers?

B4. What are the pros and cons of scrapping the Foreign Temporary Worker Program?

To what extent would scrapping the FTWP benefit or harm Canada and/or Canadians?	To what extent would scrapping the FTWP benefit or harm foreign workers and their families?



AFL Policy Statement on Temporary Foreign Workers

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May 2006 (As approved by AFL Executive Council, May 12, 2006) Alberta Federation of Labour

Alberta unions support newcomers

Alberta unions oppose racism in all of its forms - both overt and structural. We have and will continue to speak out against any attempts to demean, demonize or discriminate against any identifiable group.

Alberta unions also support immigration. We believe immigration is a key to building a strong and diverse society. We advocate for compassionate immigration policies - policies that address both the concerns of immigrants and the needs of the Canadian economy.

In particular, we believe in immigration policies that would allow a broader range of skilled workers into the country. We also believe there is a need for stronger settlement programs for newcomers.

Alberta unions strongly believe that workers of different ethnic backgrounds, nationalities and cultures can work together in solidarity. We will defend new immigrants as we defend ourselves.

Alberta unions and our members welcome newcomers to Canada. In fact, many of our members are new immigrants. We will proudly work alongside any newly arrived worker - and we will fight to ensure that those workers are treated with fairness and enjoy the same wages and working conditions and the same rights as other Canadian workers.

Foreign Temporary Worker Program

The Alberta labour movement's concern does not lie with immigration or individual newcomers to Canada. Instead, we are concerned about the way our federal and provincial governments have designed and how they operate one particular program - the Foreign Temporary Worker program.

We are also concerned by how some employers are using - we would argue misusing - that program.

We believe the Foreign Temporary Worker program is the product of sloppy policy making and the victim of weak rules and even weaker enforcement.

The stated purpose of the program is to provide Canadian employers with access to workers when critical labour shortages can be demonstrated. In addition, the program was originally intended to provide access to a pool of workers who would supplement, not replace, the existing pool of Canadian workers.

Unfortunately, it has become clear to us that at least some employers are using the program as part of a deliberate effort to drive down wages and working conditions and to bypass unionized Canadian workers.

In a sense, the program is being used as a union-busting tool. And, by allowing the program to be used in this way, our provincial and federal governments are allowing themselves to become partners in union busting.



The Alberta Situation

High oil prices and a surge in the construction of oilsands megaprojects have super-charged Alberta's economy. Unemployment is down significantly, and a tight labour market means employers are feeling pressure on wages and working conditions.

Many employers have responded to the tight labour market by taking the logical - and we would argue inevitable and appropriate - steps of adjusting wages and improving working conditions.

Some Alberta employers, however, are looking for other ways to expand their labour supply while keeping wages and working conditions low.

Citing an alleged critical shortage of skilled labour, these employers are hoping to take advantage of the Foreign Temporary Workers program to bring non-Canadian and non-landed workers into Alberta.

One high-profile example is Canadian Natural Resources Limited (CNRL), developer of the largest oilsands project in Canada.

CNRL has adopted a two-pronged strategy in its attempt to hold down construction wages.

First, the company has entered into a collective agreement with an employer-friendly union (the Christian Labour Association of Canada or CLAC).

Second, they have contracted out a significant piece of the construction work to a construction firm that intends to staff their project almost entirely with workers brought in under the Foreign Temporary Worker program.

CNRL and union busting

We believe there is insufficient evidence of a labour shortage to justify the use of temporary foreign workers on the CNRL project.

While it may be true that shortages exist in some specific trades at specific times, we know from our own experience that in many construction trades there are still unionized Alberta tradespeople currently available to work.

Even in cases where the labour pool has run drier, Alberta unions have networks across Canada that can be used to recruit workers to Alberta if needed.

Alberta unions have offered to help employers like CNRL meet their labour force needs. However, in many cases, those offers have been rebuffed.

As a result, if companies like CNRL have a problem recruiting workers, it has more to do with their strategy of undercutting wages and benefits than with a real labour shortage. In other words, the problem is not a shortage of workers, but a shortage of workers willing to work for less.



Protecting Temporary Foreign Workers

We believe at least some employers hire temporary foreign workers not because they have been unable to find Canadian workers - but because they are easier to exploit.

Temporary workers have limited rights and protections, and what rights they do hold are difficult to enforce. The continued presence of these workers in Canada is entirely contingent on their employment - so they are at the mercy of the employer who brings them into the country. There is a dangerous power imbalance inherent in this kind of relationship.

We believe workers from other countries should not be used as pawns in employer strategies to avoid unions. Both they and Canadian workers deserve better.

We believe the labour movement has a responsibility to defend these workers. We believe they deserve the same rights as any Canadian worker. In particular, we believe they should have the right to a fair wages and a safe workplace, the right to join a union, and the right to remain in Canada and apply to become citizens - independent of the wishes of the employer that brought them here.

The Foreign Temporary Worker program makes some guarantees in these areas - but without any real mechanisms for investigation and enforcement, those guarantees remain little more than a paper tiger.

As long as employers know they face no real sanctions - either for misrepresenting their real motivation in seeking foreign workers or mistreating those workers when they arrive - then some employers will continue to exploit the system.



The Way Forward

We believe both levels of government should allow employers to use temporary foreign workers only as a last resort and that, when they are in Canada, these workers should enjoy the same rights as Canadian workers - including the right to join a union and apply for citizenship.

But before offering jobs to temporary foreign workers, we believe our governments and businesses have an obligation to first consider Canada's existing pool of potential workers.

There are literally hundreds of thousands of unemployed and underemployed Canadians who - with the proper training - could fill the jobs that employers need to be filled.

Target groups for training initiatives should include: aboriginal Canadians; newly landed immigrants; women; and young people who, for one reason or another, have not received any post-secondary education.

We call on our governments to oppose efforts to undermine unions and union working conditions.

We urge them to instead to turn their attention to the real way forward: education and training.

The solution to our tight labour market is not union-busting. And it is not temporary foreign workers. The real solution is to improve our post-secondary and apprenticeship systems to make sure that Canadians are properly trained for the jobs we will need in the future.

