

In 1942, that's the time the working people were demanding unemployment insurance. It more or less came into effect because that's the time I got my first social insurance number.

Old age pension, unemployment insurance, workmen's compensation, family allowance, and the medicare—all these went always on their (community groups') list of demands for the betterment of the people in general.

The younger generation doesn't have a clue that the family allowance has been fought for, they think that it was just dished out by the government by their kindness.

Bertha Souderholm 1940s Working in Berryland

It was in 1942 that I worked in the mill and it was after 1942 that I entered Berryland. The Depression was beginning to lift. My husband did odd jobs; He was a logger, he was a fisherman, he was in trucking, and this and that, wherever he could bring in a dollar or two. We had two children, a boy and a girl. Then they got to that age where I was able to leave them more or less by themselves. Then I entered Berryland here. It's only a little ways so that I was home at six o'clock. I left at seven-thirty or seven in the morning. I was home here while Uno, he was either logging or fishing. I was home with the children, you see.

This work, of course was seasonal because it had to do with these fruits and vegetables. At that time there was no seniority clause; if you got laid off then a brand new one would take your place, even if you had months of experience.

It was hard work, and it was piece work. Piece work, it's just like a bull whip<sup>1</sup> being used on people. <sup>the</sup> The more you get into the cans, the more wages you make. Instead of creating good will amongst each other, it was the one who had the sharpest elbow and was more aggressive, well, naturally they got ahead while the timid one would stand back and not get the box that was hers to be taken.

I was more or less at the end of carrying and punching the card for women that were filling the cans, and then my job was to carry them and stack the trays and then help them to put them on the belt. In those days the canning process was ancient; it was all carrying trays.

We had eight hours, and sometimes some of us had to work nine hours. Then if there wasn't any fruit you were called in, and if you worked only an hour or two, that is all you got paid for. There was no extra pay for call out time.

Bertha Souderholm Depression Co-Ops 1.1.  
Wartime

Webster's Corners had co-ops and they did the best with them, and then as the years went by, the co-ops were obsolete and they died a so-called natural death.

People organized them in 1930. I was young at that time.

The first co-op that was formed here was just the little garage, no more than ten by ten. At that time they used to buy the food by bulk and then distribute it to their members; it was just strictly to their members. From that they expanded and got a bigger place and then formed a co-op. That was during the war years, and they used to pick up eggs from the farmers and deliver the feed to the chicken farmers.

Then they had a water co-op along Two Hundred and Fifty-sixth street, that supplied the water for that road, because during those years we didn't have the city water as we have now. The wells were pretty well dry in summertime, so these people formed a co-op to bring water to these houses all along Two Hundred and Fifty-Sixth Street, south, down there. Then they had a chicken hatchery where they hatched all the chicks for farmers, and that went along until there was no more chickens to be raised. Then they branched into dairy. Most of the Finnish farmers and others too, they had three or four cows and out of these three or four cows they were able to produce enough milk to sell that more or less kept them in groceries for the month and brought them a little extra. Well then, of course, the great big dairies

Bertha Souderholm Co-ops Wartime con't. 2.2.

came along and all the big demands for these stainless steel cool tanks and water-founts and cement floors for the barns and all the so-called sanitary regulations that were brought in and that killed off all the little dairy farmers.

The co-ops of course had the manager and then the people used to buy their chicken feed and their cow feed and the feed from the co-op besides their groveries and thier hardware and whatever was required.

Uno:

Then there was the Framers' League. Before that the Farmers' Union was here too.

They were getting grain from the Prairies and then they were distributing it.

Selling it that way they were getting it a little cheaper.

Bertha: There were boxloads of grain.

Everything went along fairly well, and then, we'd always been unfortunate in getting a manager than mismanaged a bit. Then there was a break between the membership.

The other side then went and formed a co-op exchange. That was the one where

Uno was managing it for some time and I clerked there for a year and a half,

Then it became absolutely impossible to operate it because of previous misfortunes/

with management that it ran into a hole and it just could not survive from

that so it was foreclosed.

Bertha Souderholm Depression Finnish Community 1.1.

( ) I came into Webster's Corners, as this place was known at that time, in 1929. I was ten and a half years old and came with my parents that had arrived the year before, from Finland, to Alberta. In 1929 Webster's Corners was nearly all Finnish community, because it had been settled by the Finnish-speaking people years gone by. It was known as Somentokoyaut; it has quite a history.

At that time the men worked in the bush, as loggers and sawmill workers, and then they farmed on the side. While the men were out at their jobs, the women, they manned the homes, they milked the cows, they raised the chickens, they raised the children, and also took part in the activities of the community, and that is the culture end of it.

The hall was the main centre of all activities and organizing, and that included concerts and plays, and this was all done in their spare time, after their hours of work at home. Then, in the wintertime, mostly the men were home because the woods were closed on account of the snow.

Of course 1930, '35, '36, there was those hard years down here, but the people in Webster's Corners, as I call it, they weren't as hard hit as the ones in Vancouver. They always had their own vegetables and their potatoes and chickens and meat, that they had food, but they were very, very short on money. And that was to be used very carefully.

All these farms, <sup>the</sup> they were run by <sup>the</sup> women when the men were out working.

One time we had two cows but that is all, just for our own. We have never been farmers at heart. One time we had <sup>half</sup> an acre in raspberries, right where the house is now. That wasn't very successful either. That area would the early frost and the late frost at Mission was shipping berries two weeks before us, and then we had all kinds of berries left and Mission was finished. So the field man didn't come

to pick up our raspberries so we couldn't sell them.

Bertha Souderholm Left-Wing immigrants and unionism 1930s 1.1.  
Women and organization

Webster's Corners was mostly loggers and farmers and fishermen. They were all more or less to the Left, Socialist.

We would have three act plays, and those plays would take on either a political side or a humorous side or just drama or operettas, if they had enough singers.

As far back as I remember and way before my time when I arrived here, the women have always had an organization of their so-called own, and it's been known by many different names. Then, during the Depression years there was a Women's Defense League working to raise money for the ones that were picked up for legal reasons. That was not needed anymore so it changed form to something else. During the wartime they worked for the Red Cross and then gathering clothes for Finland and then the Vietnam War. They did a tremendous amount of work to supply needed goods and sewing and money raised for the cause in Vietnam. Now we are working for the peace movement. We meet regularly once a month. This women's organization must be fifty years old.

At one time three quarters of the women in the community belonged to the organization, but now it has dwindled down as far as the Finnish population has dwindled. Most of them have passed on, and they are so old they cannot take active part, but we still have a small group.

Out of a group of women, now, you have the ones that hate unions and ones that are for unions, and out of those there were a few of us that knew that if we could get a union in that we would get better conditions that way. There were about four of us that began to casually talk amongst the women on lunch hours that we should have it organized. Of course being green you didn't know exactly how to go about it. As time went on we found that we <sup>could</sup> get in contact with a local in Vancouver that was looking after food workers. From there we finally got hold of a man that came out to talk to us and through that little start we were finally able to get a union started and our first contract was signed. The contract, of course, wasn't anything to write home about, but it was better than the conditions were. It's from then that it has progressed that to-day they have much better, although there's still a lot of improvements that could be made.

You could be neighbours, and one is against and one is for, so you have your differences. Then, when we finally got the union in there we did have a clause that all have to pay union dues whether you signed up as a member or not. There were quite a few of them that said, "I don't want to belong to the union and I do not want to pay the union dues." Our come back used to be, "If you don't want to pay your union dues, you go and tell the boss that you don't want to take the gain either, that was realized by the contract." Of course that gave them a little different view, they thought, "Well, I'm losing something." Although they didn't want to pay that two dollars. They wanted the raise but they didn't want to pay.

Now it has progressed that it's either a very few members working, but they are practically during the year. They do everything now from blueberries to beans, and pork and beans, which at my time it was just strictly fruit.

Bertha Souderholm 2.2. Union Organization

The wildcat was the first feeling, the first try. After talking about trying to get ~~more~~ wages and trying to get a union, and not knowing exactly how to go about it, one day we finally pulled off at noontime, a wildcat strike. We all didn't go back at one o'clock except three, three scabs went in. and We stayed outside till the manager or owner of Berryland came out. Our wages at that time was thrity-five cents an hour, and we demanded fifty cents. We got a five cent raise, so we got forty cents. That was a victory. That more or less began to bring in the union.

As stewards we supervised and ~~block~~ in complaints. Being on piece work, the shop steward had to watch that some of the women wouldn't go in there half an hour early to start doing the work while the others would start ~~at~~ one o'clock, and they would go in at eleven-thirty. With the union, it was gradually being fought to the point where piece work was abolished.

Bertha Souderholm Union in Berryland 3.3.

A year after I left the union struggle was really the hottest issue there.

Three women were fired for union organizing, which at time, already against  
was,  
the rules of organized labour. You're not supposed to be fired for union  
activities. One was taken back but the other two were let go.

This area was heavily populated by the Japanese. They had those tremendous strawberry fields and raspberries and asparagus fields and all <sup>the</sup> these vegetables, and rhubarb. Then when the war came they were forced out of their farms and they were taken into the compound at the exhibition grounds in Vancouver. From there I think that most of the Maple Ridge people were sent to Lilloet. They were driven away from the coast, and not too many of them have come back into Maple Ridge, there's not too many Japanese here at all anymore.

The Finnish people and the ones with any kind of political knowledge in the community, well they felt: now it's the Japanese, what nationality will it be next? We felt that it was very wrong of them to ship them out and just tear them out and confiscate their boats and the same way with the famrs, they got next to nothing for them. They'd do that to the Japanese, they could do that to any other nationality.

Union and Jobactions (UFAWU)

Bertha Souderholm Cannery work Clemtu 1.1. Post-War

Uno was a tenderman there and I got a job at Clemtu that was a fish slimer (or washer). From there I progressed. I did odds and ends, but I worked there for nine seasons. That was seasonal work, so it involved two and a half months, one time was three months. It all depended on the amount of fish and how long the season was.

It was a mixture, men and women workers. The cannery was on Native land, and their village was just about half a mile from the cannery. In the first year we were there there was the red line on the sidewalk that the white man cannot cross that line after ten o'clock in the evening, and all kinds of restrictions that way. There were only four or five of us white women in the cannery. Some of the Natives were quite hostile to us for taking the job from one of their women. Some of the white women would pass some kind of dirty names, like, "All those Natives...or something."

The union was never involved. The supervisor was involved when things got a little bit high on the grading table, when the fish began to fling one way or the other, 'cause it felt that one wasn't pulling enough fish and the other one is sluffing, the deal that usually goes with working forces. But the union was never with the women, they was never involved.

That Cannery it took in Chinese, there were a lot of Chinese men there, too. The Chinese they were slated; they had their work and it was mostly emptying out boats and they were really overworked.

There was one time then, at ten o'clock those Chinamen, they began to clean out their machines and that was it. That was it. They were talking away

but not a thing moved that night. (Laughs.) They were just plain overworked.

We worked tremendously long hours, sometimes fourteen hours at a straight.

Then, the clause came in that women couldn't; they have to have eight to ten hour rest period. (??? I need to figure out the meaning of this more) we had to give in a little on a load of fish  
Sometimes it just couldn't be done because of the fish, and if it wasn't done it would spoil, so there was a bit of leeway, but mostly then, we got the ten hour rest period. But the men were overworked on the tallydock till they just about dropped.

One of the most bitter memories was that I worked as washing fish. Then for ten o'clock they needed sandwiches, so I helped the supervisor to make sandwiches, Then, at ten I worked in the mess house to help the cook out. Then, at three o'clock I'd help with the sandwiches down there and then about five o'clock go down to the mess house. After you get through with the mess house, well, then go back to the cannery and wash fish and then help with some more sandwiches, If it was a long day, then twelve o'clock, you had to make more sandwiches. At one time we made fifty-two double loaves of sandwiches for the crews down there. Then, when it came payday, I figured that overtime was in force then, I figured that I'd get a fair pay. My pay was cut because the office said that "The woman is eating too much money". There was no way that I could fight to get what was coming, so then I dropped some of those extra jobs.

They had the money. The trouble was that they worked us so many long hours and being time and a half and sometimes double time, that was more than some of the men would be making. The order came, according to the bookkeeper, from the head

Bertha Souderholm Cannery Work Clemtu POST-WAR 3.3.

office. The way that the bookkeeper said it, "No woman is worth that much money," and that is the thing that hurt themost. I had worked for it, and I was not told anything before. You went up there just for a period of time and figured that, if you can take it and if you can slug it out, and you get that little extra money, you're a little bit ahead. But then to be slapped like that.

It was all unionized. It was up to part-time and temporary workers to apply for membership and become a full-fledged member, or then just work, but pay union dues. Most of them were union members.