

Unit 3: Video 3 Transcript

Q: How did the Industrial Revolution impact the creation of the working class?

A: Okay. One of the things about combined and uneven development in the first Industrial Revolution was that the industrialization that took place was quite decentralized. It was spread all over the settled parts of the countries which meant the Maritime provinces, St. Lawrence Valley in Quebec, Southern Ontario, even a bit in British Columbia by 1860's and '70s Victoria and Vancouver. These were places that had set up industries that for the most part were going to run year 'round. They would-- might well close down for a while but this made them quite different from the great preindustrial industries where workers have been drawn together, say, in the fur trade or in the lumbering industry. Where they were just used for a season and sent home to do something else. The difference this time is that employers wanted these workers to stay as long as they could. They wanted them to be permanent employees. They had some labourers that they would use on a daily basis and send them packing, but the workers that they were putting on the machines or the skilled workers they brought in, they wanted them to become committed to being workers, no longer saying this is just part time. This is just something I do before I become a farmer, which had been the old experience of preindustrial wage-earning. Now wage earning was supposed to be something you did for life. And immigration encouraged that to bring in as many people as possible, not entirely successfully in Canada because the opportunities were greater in the United States so we led heavily with lots of new immigrants who arrived and took off. But nonetheless in cities like Montreal, St. John, New Brunswick, Halifax, Toronto, Hamilton and several other Southern Ontario cities, Vancouver, Victoria, groups of workers began to settle in. They would move around for sure but there were communities of workers that began to develop that were more or less permanent. That workers would feel themselves to be part of an ongoing process of industrial development. Equally true, out of these major, more metropolitan centres, in the mining communities there were considerable numbers of coalminers who

were brought in, often with their skills intact from wherever they'd been brought from, who settled into mining towns in Nova Scotia and in British Columbia in considerable numbers. Coal being, of course, a hugely important commodity for the development of an Industrial Revolution 'cause you got to feed those steam engines. And they too became relatively permanent, long lasting communities of workers who had developed their own sense of their identity and their interests. And that's the key part of the story in some ways, because you can recruit people to come and work for you and you have a certain sense of how they're going to fulfill your needs as a workforce. But they developed their own sense of what they want out of their lives and they developed households with their families or perhaps with, if they're just single, with other bachelor boardinghouse residents. But they developed community organizations. They developed habits of spending their social time. And they begin to talk about their particular needs and interests which draw them together increasingly by the 1870's and '80s into organizations that we recognize as unions. The organizations that represent wage earners in the workplace and will raise issues that will try and better their conditions in the workplace. To the greatest extent this was the more skilled workers. There's an uneasy, and quite inaccurate, assumption that in the old days before the Industrial Revolution we had skilled workers and then along came the Industrial Revolution and we had none. And in actual fact a large number of the workers that were brought in to industry were brought into what we've taken to calling manufactories. They were a kind of middle zone between the old artisanal shop and the full-scale, highly technologically sophisticated factory. And they largely worked at their traditional crafts, although those increasingly got altered in different ways, perhaps narrowed in some ways, some of their tasks would be taken away. Some of their independence on the job would be taken away. But there were large numbers, thousands of craft workers, working inside industry. And they began to feel the pinch. They didn't like the way they were being treated and thought their best interests weren't being pursued. So the first organizations that are created are craft unions that are concerned about trying to better those conditions to make sure that they can preserve what they understand to be the traditions and expectations of the craft which they don't believe their employers are any longer respecting. It's not a world anymore where there's

a master craftsman and a bunch of journeymen and apprentices all of them sharing the craft tradition. They feel like the employers have abandoned that, they've become capitalists who want to make a profit out of industry and don't care about the craft. So it's up to craft unions to make that commitment to do so. A similar development happens in the mining communities where they are equally concerned about what happens to the traditions of their mining crafts and how they're treated and mistreated. And so equally, and slightly later, they develop a set of mining unions that are-- whose goal is to pursue the best interests of working miners in the mining towns on the two coasts.