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Life in the Cities

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- Approx. 1/3 of new immigrants settled in cities during the Laurier period. Montreal & Toronto double in size and Winnipeg, Calgary & Vancouver grew rapidly as well.
- 1914 – 50% of Canada’s population was urban.
- Immigrants in the cities had a hard life:
 - Many lived in poor areas of the city with dirty cramped apartments.
 - Many spoke little English and worked as labourers for poor wages.

Fighting for Labour Rights

- The economic prosperity of the Laurier Era didn’t extend to all. Canadian industry was controlled by a few corporations like Imperial Oil, Dunsmuir Coal & Massey-Harris.
- There was a large gap between the rich owners and the poor working class. As the gap increased workers wanted a greater share of the prosperity.
- Many immigrants came from countries with strong labour unions. Canadian workers began to organize their own unions.
- These early unions faced a difficult struggle.
 - A steady influx of new immigrants made it easy to replace unskilled labour.
 - The government & police were on the side of the owners.
 - Companies hired private police & “strike-breakers” when workers staged demonstrations or strikes.
- 1910-1914 – labour unrest was widespread and many violent confrontations broke out between employers & workers.

The Big Strike

- Early 1900s – Vancouver Island coal mines were known for their high-quality coal & the dangerous working conditions.
- The Dunsmuir family controlled the coal industry on Van. Island. They were known to have little concern for safety. They hired strike-breakers and Asian workers to replace strikers.
- 1910 – the mines were sold & the new owners cut wages to increase profits. The workers would strike for four years & it spreads across Van. Island.
- 1913 – striker’s families were thrown out of their company-owner houses with little notice. Many were forced to camp on beaches.
- After disturbances the government called in the militia and a mass arrest of 179 strikers followed. 39 were sent to prison.

