

## Document 1: Frank Rogers Biography

**ROGERS, FRANK**, political activist and union organizer; b. c. 1878; was married and had a family; d. 15 April 1903 in Vancouver.

By 1899 Frank Rogers was a leader in the factious left-wing community of Vancouver. He belonged to the first socialist group formed in the city, a local of the Socialist Labor Party established in 1898, but he left it in 1899 when it renounced unionism as essentially palliative. With Will MacLain, he subsequently formed a splinter club that became the United Socialist Labor Party in early 1900. Among its policies were a number of “immediate demands,” a concession to political reality that the SLP rejected as opportunism. In the provincial election that year the USLP fielded the first socialist candidate to run for public office in British Columbia, MacLain, and under Rogers’s guidance, it organized the first May Day celebrations in Vancouver.

Rogers also played a significant part in the city’s labour movement. He was a longshoreman and never worked in the fishing industry, but his most notable contribution to unionism was made through his vice-presidency of the fishermen’s union. Based in New Westminster and Vancouver, this body had been organized in late 1899 and early 1900. By the summer of 1900, when Rogers led an industry-wide strike, he was vice-president and was acknowledged to be the leader. The workforce was a multiracial one; about half the licences to fish on the Fraser were held by Japanese. Rogers attempted to unite the Japanese, natives, and Europeans who worked along the river, but bitter divisions between the groups remained. The central issues in the strike were recognition of the union and the establishment of a fixed price for sockeye salmon. Union boats patrolled the fishing grounds to discourage strikebreaking, and the Fraser River Cannery Association regarded the patrols as intimidation. Once talks broke down, the association was able to have the militia called out. (The three justices of the peace who signed the requisition were a cannery owner, a former partner in a cannery, and a foreman at a cannery.) The day before the call-out Rogers had been arrested for intimidation, a charge which was withdrawn two days later. With substantial numbers of Japanese willing to work and the militia present to prevent demonstrations, the cannery association was able to take a hard line with the union, which it never officially recognized. The strikers agreed to return to work in early August, having gained their demand for a uniform price. Although they had won less than total victory, Rogers’s popularity remained high. He was given an ovation and elected president of the union.

The sockeye season in 1901 was also disrupted by a strike, which was in many ways a reprise of 1900. Rogers again spoke for the union and ended up in jail, this time for his alleged role in kidnapping some Japanese and marooning them on Bowen Island. Although never convicted, he spent some four months in custody before being allowed bail. After the 1901 strike he played no further role in the union and by 1903 the organization itself seems to have collapsed.

Rogers’s connection with the labour movement continued, however. During the spring of 1903 clerical staff of the Canadian Pacific Railway went on strike. In Vancouver, a city already well established as a union stronghold, workers rallied to their cause. Longshoremen and others involved in transportation refused to handle CPR freight. Rogers, active in the stevedores’ union, soon became involved. On the night of 13 April he and several others went to investigate a

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# Working People: A History of Labour in BC

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gathering by the CPR tracks at the foot of Abbott Street. They were fired upon, and Rogers died of his wounds 36 hours later.

Many people concluded that a CPR strike-breaker or special constable was responsible for Rogers's death, an inference that is supported by circumstantial evidence. The subsequent inquest, however, found that he had been murdered "by some person or persons unknown." The police charged a non-union CPR employee, James MacGregor, but no substantive evidence was produced at the trial and he was freed. Rogers's murder was used by socialists to support their claims about the class struggle and it undermined the efforts of moderate labour leaders [see Christopher FOLEY].

JEREMY MOUAT

BCARS, GR 429, box 10, file 1114/03; GR 1327, no.46/03. NA, MG 26, G: 50142. *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), 19 April 1903. *Independent* (Vancouver), 18 April 1903. *Vancouver Daily Province*, 23 June, 23, 25 July 1900; 6–22 July, 3, 7, 12 Aug., 10 Sept., 5 Nov. 1901; 14–21 April 1903. *Vancouver Daily World*, 24–25 July 1900; 7 Aug., 8–31 Oct., 5 Nov. 1901; 14–22 April, 7 May 1903. *Weekly News-Advertiser* (Vancouver), 21 April 1903. B.C., Legislative Assembly, *Journals*, 1900: cxli–clxxix, esp. clxxv–clxxix; *Sessional papers*, 1900: 1005–13. R. A. Johnson, "No compromise – no political trading: the Marxian socialist tradition in British Columbia" (PHD thesis, Univ. of B.C., Vancouver, 1975). Loosmore, "B.C. labor movement." McCormack, *Reformers, rebels, and revolutionaries*. P. A. Phillips, *No power greater: a century of labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1967). H. K. Ralston, "The 1900 strike of Fraser River sockeye salmon fishermen" (MA thesis, Univ. of B.C., 1965). Robin, *Radical politics and Canadian labour*. P. E. Roy, *A white man's province: British Columbia politicians and Chinese and Japanese immigrants, 1858–1914* (Vancouver, 1989). P. G. Silverman, "A history of the militia and defences of British Columbia, 1871–1914" (MA thesis, Univ. of B.C., 1956); "Military aid to civil power in British Columbia; the labor strikes at Wellington and Steveston, 1890, 1900," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* (Seattle, Wash.), 61 (1970): 156–61. J. H. Tuck, "The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees in western Canada, 1898–1905," *Labour*, 11 (1983): 63–88. W. P. Ward, *White Canada forever: popular attitudes and public policy towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal, 1978).

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## Document 2

## BC Historical News

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Written by Janet Mary Nicol

ON 18 April 1903, as a heavy rain fell, the longshoremen's union led more than eight hundred mourners to the old city cemetery above the blue inlet and overlooking mountains around Vancouver. They came to bury union organizer Frank Rogers, placing an anchor-shaped wreath with the word "martyr" inscribed at his grave. The funeral was the largest gathering of trade unionists the city had experienced. Rogers was only thirty years old when he was shot late at night on a waterfront picket line a few blocks from his rented room. He died two days later in hospital. A strikebreaker hired by the Canadian Pacific Railway was arrested for his murder but later acquitted in court. Rogers's murder remains unsolved.

Many aspects of Frank Rogers's life are a mystery. No photos exist of him, and details of his personal life are sketchy though his exploits as a union organizer made the front pages of local newspapers. His next of kin are not recorded in official documents and his funeral, which was paid for by union members, was not attended by family. Rogers immigrated from Scotland to the United States as a young man. He was a seaman in the American navy and merchant service. In 1897 he followed hundreds of eager male adventurers to Vancouver, most en route to the Klondike in the last great gold rush of the continent's history.

Rogers chose to stay in the city, moving in and out of rented rooms in its oldest section, Gastown, and working seasonally at the Burrard Inlet docks. Over the next six years Rogers helped build the longshoremen, fishermen, and railway unions. He appeared like a shooting star to the city's labour movement; his entrance coinciding with a burst of new organizing and his death followed by its temporary collapse. The working port attracted a diverse and unconventional group of labourers: "all of that breed of men the world nails to its crosses," observed an anonymous writer in a March 1911 *British Columbia Magazine* article.

These workers including French, Swedes, Punjabis, Asians, and First Nations, "knew the harbor and its ships as a suburbanite knows the houses on his own street." Longshoremen formed a union in 1888 and had been on strike ten times by the century's turn, yet their basic rights were far from assured. It was this world Rogers first entered at age 24. A fedora shading his eyes, Rogers walked to work, we can imagine, along a wood-planked sidewalk, dressed in grey pants with wide suspenders and a long-sleeved white shirt. Passing hotel saloons, shooting galleries, and warehouses, he turned off Gore Street, crossed the CPR tracks and joined a long queue of men standing on the wharf beside a moored sailing ship. The head stevedore selected men for the day's work at 35 cents an hour. If Rogers made the cut, he fell in with the chosen gang, unloading cargo from the ship's hold, ropes and pulleys creaking. A foreman's whistle directed the gang's movements. The Alhambra hotel saloon, situated in Gastown's oldest brick structure still known as the Byrnes Block, was a popular place for waterfront workers after a ten-hour shift. Surely Rogers would be there, leaning against its bar, holding a beer, and talking union. Longshoremen moved exotic, difficult, and dangerous cargo. They unloaded bales of silk off ships from Asia to train cars heading for New York. Two workers were needed to lift a single sack of sugar.

"There were a lot of men who couldn't stand up to that kind of work," according to retired stevedore Harry Walter in an oral account, "Man Along the Shore." "[Sugar] was worse than lead and lead was tough too." Handling sulphur could be hazardous and so was exposure to dust from

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

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wheat. “A lot of grain boys died from that wheat,” retired longshoremen Frank McKenzie remembered. “Used to use handkerchiefs around their mouths and nose[s].”

“At first we had nothing,” Axel Nymen recalled of his time in the longshoremen’s union. “It was a ship side pick.” The foremen arbitrarily selected men for a day’s work and assigned tasks unevenly. “We had a union with the general cargo people,” Alex said, “but it all went haywire when they shot the president of the Fishermen’s Union [Frank Rogers].”

Mike Vidulich was a young fisherman when he met Frank Rogers on the picket line in 1900. He described him to labour historian Hal Griffiths as “stocky” and “quite short but broad in the shoulders, with a strong, open face and dark hair beginning to grey at the sides.” “He was a good speaker, but quiet, not like Will MacClain [another strike leader] who used to shout and storm when he spoke,” Vidulich recalled. “Rogers was an organizer, one of the best the fishermen ever had. The cannery could never buy him.” Vidulich said Rogers wasn’t ambitious for himself but committed to the rights of the rank-and-file workers.

“He believed in unions and socialism,” he said. Cannery employers took a different view, calling Rogers an outside agitator and socialist from the United States who wasn’t even a fisherman by trade. But their accusations were no match for a socialist’s passion. Rogers was hired by the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada in the winter of 1899 to organize the Vancouver local of the BC Fishermen’s Union. When the salmon season opened the following July, fishermen voted to strike against cannery owners for union recognition and a uniform price on fish at 25 cents each. Rogers helped unite more than four thousand immigrant European and Japanese as well as a few hundred First Nations fishermen in seven union lodges along the rivers and inlets of BC. An old farmhouse served as key union headquarters in Steveston, then a distant village from Vancouver on the Fraser River.

Rogers sensed which groups would withhold their labour, as reported in the Daily World: “Secretary Rogers said that there would be 1000 white fishermen and all the old-time Japanese who would not go out at all.” First Nations groups supported the strike but the vast majority of recent Japanese immigrants, organized separately in a benevolent society, were less sure, knowing they had few employment options in a racially antagonistic province dominated by citizens of British origin. With the help of a translator, Rogers worked hard to convince Japanese fishermen to withdraw their labour.

During the first three weeks of picketing all were united. Strikers in patrol boats carrying a white flag with the number “25” in red, effectively cleared the Fraser River of strikebreakers. The cannery in turn threatened to evict strikers in Steveston bunkhouses and withhold food. The union retaliated by organizing Vancouver shopkeepers to donate bread, potatoes, and tents. Japanese strikers were permitted limited fishing and the union urged all citizens to purchase their catch as a show of support. But on 20 July Japanese fishermen broke from the strike, agreeing to 20 cents a fish and returning to work. Asamatsu Murakami defended this action in the book *Steveston Recollected, A Japanese- Canadian History*. “We are settled fishermen,” he said, “and if we are left without any link with the company, each family will be as helpless as troops without provisions.” Murakami said those who defied the union had their nets cut, sails torn, and their life threatened. “At 6 AM,” he recalled, “two white men came to the wharf and spoke to K. Maeda on his boat. He could not speak any English and they beat him up.” The government agreed to call out the militia to protect the returning Japanese fishermen so the canneries could re-open. This was the third time in the province’s history the militia was used in a labour dispute. It was likely no coincidence that Rogers was arrested and jailed in Vancouver overnight on picket-related charges just before the

## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

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militia arrived in Steveston on 22 July. As a testament to Rogers's leadership, strikers were at a loss until he was released on bail the next day and travelled the fifteen miles to Steveston by stage along forest-lined Granville Street. The union stubbornly continued negotiating for another week despite the show of force. They settled at 19 cents a fish and did not win union recognition, returning to work 30 July. Though their gains were intangible, for a short time a diverse group of workers had felt a collective strength. The union membership elected Frank Rogers president. No clues indicate a woman in Rogers's life.

Romance did find his political ally, William MacClain. With Rogers's help, MacClain was the first socialist to run (unsuccessfully) for office in BC in 1899. He married local woman Mary Ellen Dupont the same year. She volunteered by MacClain's side as he helped lead the fishermen's strike—a role that cost him his job as a machinist with the CPR. The couple left the province sometime after the dispute ended, possibly moving to MacClain's previous residence in Washington State.

The next summer, union fishermen were ready to strike again. The canners pounced, arresting Rogers 12 July with eight other fishermen on picket-related charges. The press noted with alarm some of the accused men were well known in the city and had families. Justice Drake was less sympathetic, calling all the strikers "thieves" and "robbers", making special reference to one black and two Chilean strikers as "foreigners" not familiar with "British ways." While Rogers was in custody the union settled and its members were back fishing 19 July, still without gaining union recognition. Meanwhile, the Vancouver Trades and Labour Congress set up a defence fund and faithfully brought food to the nine strikers in the New Westminster county jail. Four months later all but Rogers were tried, acquitted, and released from their prison ordeal. Rogers was last to be let go on \$10,000 bail with his trial held over to the next spring, at which time charges were dropped. "I am going off for a week's recreation now," he told a Daily World reporter after his release. The reporter observed Rogers was as keen as ever in speech but crunched up slightly in appearance. "I am going to have a little sport shooting and then shall come back to work here for the winter," Rogers said. Rogers returned to the rank and file of the longshoremen's union and kept a low public profile until the winter of 1903 when railway workers walked off the job 27 February after a clerk was fired for organizing employees into the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees. The CPR vowed to spend a million dollars to break the picketers, employing special police and spies. Also undermining strikers were the railway craft unionists who refused to strike in support of less skilled workers. But across western Canada, workers in other unions boycotted "scab" freight. Rogers helped organize a sympathy strike of longshoremen as the dispute moved into spring.

The fateful night of 13 April began innocently enough. Rogers finished eating a late supper at Billy Williams' Social Oyster and Coffee House and stepped out onto Cordova Street around 11:20 PM, breathing in fresh night air cleansed by an earlier rainfall. Turning on Water Street, he met up with two acquaintances, also labourers, Antonio Saborino and Larry O'Neill. All were heading to nearby Gastown lodgings. As the trio approached Abbott Street, they saw figures in the darkened distance beyond the railway tracks. Interested in the CPR picket activity, the men decided to investigate. Less than an hour earlier a fist fight had occurred between CPR strikebreakers and strikers.

The strikebreakers fled to the moored steamship, Yosemite, a makeshift sleeping quarter provided by the CPR during the labour dispute. Two of the strikebreakers had lost a hat and umbrella and were returning to the tracks just as Rogers, O'Neill, and Saborino appeared. The men were accompanied by a pair of armed special police hired by the CPR. Also in the vicinity was a lone strikebreaker in a small office shed, who spotted Rogers standing near the tracks directly beneath a



## Working People: A History of Labour in BC

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light and pulled his gun. As shots rang out in the dark, the two special policemen responded by firing their guns several times.

Rogers was hit by a bullet almost immediately and fell to his knees. O'Neill and Saborino ran for cover, then seeing Rogers fall, they rushed to his aid and pulled him back to the street. Passers by helped them carry the wounded Rogers to the Great Western Hotel on Water Street. Rogers was laid out on a table until a hack arrived and he was driven to the old city hospital at 530 Cambie. Rogers survived the night bandaged with the bullet still lodged in his stomach. The next morning he told the police: "I did not have any trouble or row with anyone that night, neither did Larry O'Neill, nor the other man who was with me, that I know of. I do not know who shot me, but I think it must have been someone off the Yosemite or some of the special police. I had had no trouble with anyone for some time past. I did not see anyone else going down on to the wharf with us. When the shots were fired there were others [people] who came running to the end of the street. I do not know where they came from." Rogers told news reporters he would recover as he was young and strong. The doctor later disclosed the wound was inoperable. Rogers died the next afternoon, 15 April.

Members of the VTLC executive recognized "the high esteem in which the late brother was held by organized labour in this city and that the cause has lost a useful and ardent worker and faithful champion of unionism." They arranged a funeral service at the Labor Temple and burial at Mountain View Cemetery. An anonymous "intimate friend" of Rogers told a DailyWorld reporter: "His was a daring soul, but he evidently was born under an ill-omened star, as he seemed to get into trouble very early—and on a number of cases innocently." And the editor of Winnipeg's labour newspaper characterized Rogers as a "warm unionist." Tuesday night following the funeral, union members and sympathizers crowded the old City Hall auditorium to protest Rogers' murder. Speakers condemned the CPR and called on the government to forbid employers from arming strikebreakers.

The VTLC posted a \$500 reward for Rogers' murderer. Two CPR strikebreakers were charged. One was released and the other, James MacGregor, a strikebreaker brought in from Montreal by the CPR to work as a clerk, was tried three weeks after the shooting in a New Westminster court. Conviction depended on a key witness, strikebreaker William F. Armstrong, who had been one of the men returning to the tracks with two special police. At the preliminary hearing Armstrong testified MacGregor admitted to firing the fatal shot from the office shed in the direction of Rogers.

However at the trial, Armstrong changed part of his testimony, which cast doubt on his entire statement. MacGregor was acquitted by a jury 7 May, due to lack of evidence. A news reporter observed the accused had not been the least anxious throughout the trial. The CPR had hired a top lawyer to defend MacGregor, and some say the employer paid MacGregor to leave town after the trial. The coroner's report concluded Rogers was "murdered by person or persons unknown." The union movement was outraged justice was not served. For a time, employers in the city held the upper hand and when the UBRE strike ended two months after Rogers's death, the union failed to achieve recognition or employer guarantees to hire back strikers. Other unions involved in sympathy strikes were dismantled, including the longshoremen's.

Trade unionists acknowledge Frank Rogers's contribution, hopeful the province's first—but not last—labour martyr will be remembered. In 1978 a local labour history group placed a commemorative stone at Rogers's grave. It reads, "Frank Rogers / Murdered by a Scab / In Strike against CPR / Died April 15, 1903 / Union Organizer and Socialist." This epitaph tells us how Rogers died. His life tells us what he dreamed for working people.

## Document 3: Frank Rogers Memorial (News Item)

**Labour organizer honoured**

Apr 08, 2003

By Julie Ovenell-Carter

On April 13, SFU's centre for labour studies will lay a wreath at the grave of Vancouver labour organizer Frank Rogers to mark the 100th anniversary of his murder by anti-unionists.

"Remembering Frank Rogers reminds us that the rights and freedoms we have enjoyed were not given to us," says centre director and labour history professor Mark Leier (left). "They were fought for, and continue to be fought for today in B.C. and around the world. Marking Rogers' murder is a way of appreciating that sacrifice, and of reflecting on the struggles we face today."

Rogers was a prominent labour activist who led the Fraser river salmon strike of 1900-1901. That strike marked the first time Caucasian and Asian workers fought together for better conditions. Further, the strike proved that a group of workers many thought could not be organized could, in fact, form a union.

In 1903, Rogers supported the United Brotherhood of Railroad Employees (UBRE) in the strike that resulted from the Canadian Pacific Railways' refusal to recognize the union. Late on April 13, Rogers visited the UBRE picket line at the foot of Abbott Street to protest abuses by CPR strikebreakers, and was subsequently shot and mortally wounded. A strikebreaker and CPR special policeman were arrested for Rogers' murder, but the policeman was never charged, and the strikebreaker, defended by a CPR lawyer, was found not guilty.

Although Rogers' funeral attracted many labour supporters, his grave remained unmarked until the 1980s. The memorial tribute, co-sponsored by the centre and the Pacific Northwest Labour History Association, will include an address by B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair. The service will be held graveside at the Horne Block Mountain View cemetery, near 33rd Ave. and Fraser Street in Vancouver, at 1:30 p.m. All are welcome.



Frank Rogers Grave marker at Mountain View Cemetery in Vancouver, BC