Lesson: Bows and Arrows Backgrounders Part I & II

**Part One: Bows and Arrows: William Nahanee & Local 526 of the Industrial Workers of the World**

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City of Vancouver Archives-William Nahanee with a group of longshoremen-Mi P2-1889.

**Introduction**

In 1906, approximately sixty lumber handlers and waterfront workers in North Vancouver, British Columbia joined together to form Local 526 of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). IWW Local 526 was one of the first union to be established on the Burrard Inlet Docks. While many members were Chinese, English, Hawaiian, and Chilean, the majority were Coast Salish indigenous peoples of the Squamish First Nation. The Local’s First Nations leadership and the fact that meetings were held on the nearby Mission reserve led to the local adopting the “Bows and Arrows” nickname. Together, the workers of the IWW “Bows and Arrows” local pursued numerous strategies to fight racial prejudice on the waterfront and to assert their collective power as essential dock workers, known by many as, “the greatest men to ever work the lumber” (Parnaby, 64).

**First Nations Workers After First Contact**

Contrary to popular belief, First Nations peoples were not made irrelevant by the advent of white, European settlement and the coming of industrial capitalism to the shores of the Pacific Coast. From the establishment of the Colony of Vancouver Island in 1849, through Confederation in 1871, and to the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886, First Nations peoples comprised the majority of the population in present-day British Columbia, and the majority of the work force in agriculture, fishing, and the growing primary industries

By 1885 a crude estimate based on reports by an Indian Agent suggests that of the 28,000 indigenous peoples living in British Columbia at that time, over 85 per cent belonged to bands that earned substantial incomes through paid labour. Many of the coastal indigenous peoples also were selling their labour for wages by the early twentieth century, as well as traditional fishing practices, and others in the interior were mining or logging.

**First Nations Workers on the Waterfront**

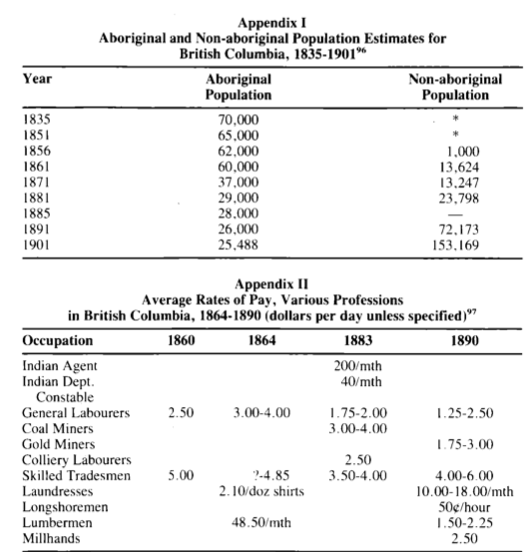
The ways of life of the Squamish peoples was altered significantly after the first sawmill appeared on Burrard Inlet in 1863. Indigenous men and women took up a number of seasonal occupations, including longshoring for men, and in doing so thus played important roles in the industrialization of British Columbia. On the docks, men worked in a setting characterized by turbulent labour relations, strong competition for work, and sharp distinctions of specialization.

Issues of class and race also complicated the working docks. Indigenous longshoremen found this affected what job they might do, whom they might work with, and what their political options were, on and off the waterfront. Many of them gravitated to the lumber docks, where they often found they had the right skills, and specialization. They would also find more acceptance and collective support. Though Squamish workers were considered by many “the greatest men that ever worked the lumber,” they faced very real and unequal racial prejudice and discrimination on the job daily. This discriminatory spirit was reinforced by employers who benefited from competition from racially distinct gangs and who tended to hire non-aboriginal men to handle general cargo.

Moreover, many of the established unions that were available for workers to join at the time made a point of denying membership to indigenous peoples and other minorities thought to be lazy, inferior, and a threat to white jobs. Indigenous workers faced racism at work and in society in general.

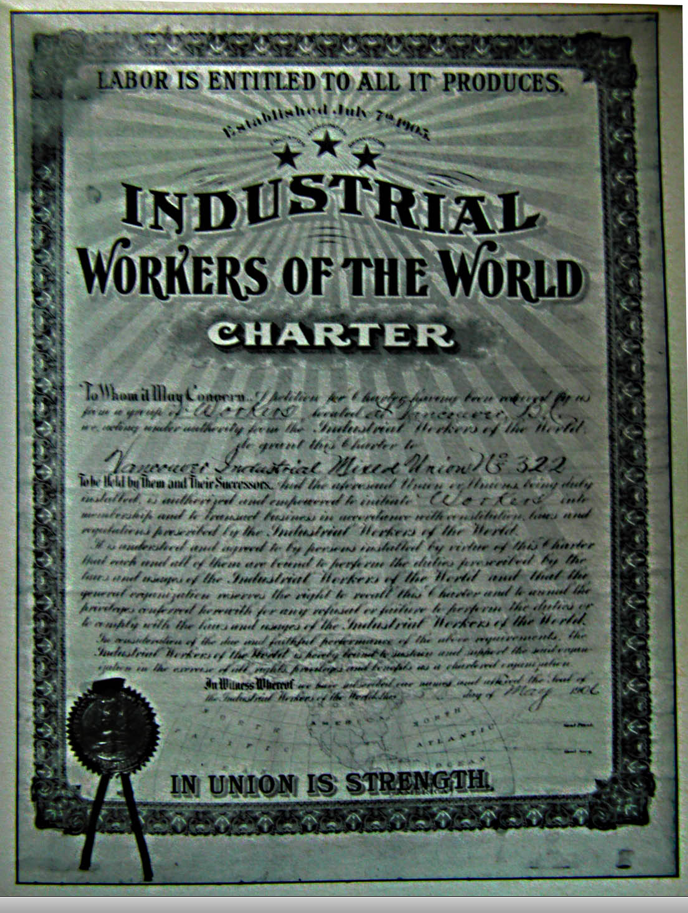
*Vancouver Public Library-6738-HaulingLumber-1906-NIS*

**Appendices for Discussion Questions 1 and 2**



**Part Two: Bows and Arrows: William Nahanee & Local 526 of the Industrial Workers of the World**

**By Gavin Hainsworth**



IWW charter 1906 Vancouver at UBC

**Joining the IWW**

Established in Chicago on 27 June 1905, the IWW was founded on principles of direct action, racial solidarity, militant struggle, and the ability of workers themselves to abolish capitalism and run society for the good of all.

The IWW’s core values are captured succinctly in the preamble to the constitution: ***“The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth” (Preamble to IWW Constitution).***

Crucial to the IWW’s broad- based appeal was their belief in organizing all workers, regardless of skill, location, gender, or race; hence the power of the IWW’s rallying cry ***“An Injury to One is an Injury to All”***

In this regard, the IWW (or “Wobblies” as they are known) were a radically oppositional force. They were clear and consistent in denouncing the treatment of all workers, including Aboriginal workers, and the International accepted the creation of Local 526 in 1906 for the lumber handlers on Burrard Inlet, most of whom were Squamish, but also included other marginalized and disempowered groups. Big Bill Haywood, General-Secretary-Treasurer of the IWW and admirer and frequenter attendee of Native American dances, made his views quite clear there can be *no* solution to *any* major social problem “until the Earth is redeemed from private ownership and the spirit of cooperation prevails.”

In fact, Haywood saw the IWW’s commitment to organizing the unorganized as akin to “going down in the gutter to get at the mass of workers and bring them up to a decent plane of living” Within one year of the IWW founding convention, five IWW locals were established in BC: Phoenix, Greenwood, Victoria, Mayie, and the “Bows and Arrows” local in Vancouver. The IWW’s idea of cross racial solidarity was clearly grasped on the job by many BC workers.

The IWW’s strong commitment to racial solidarity, direct action, flexibility, and worker control allowed the “Bows and Arrows” local 526 to become a strong voice for waterfront workers to fight for respect, better pay, and the ability to provide for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, the local did not last long as a nasty waterfront strike in 1907, which apparently was marked by impressive levels of racial solidarity, led to the local’s eventual collapse.

**Legacy and Lessons:**

While the IWW “Bows and Arrows” local 526 was short lived, it is important as it spoke and acted strongly against what was a predominantly racial divided and class stratified time period in British Columbia. Its example stands also as a time that unionism and indigenous protest coincided. A very early social justice union break though and landmark. In this way, Local 526 must be remembered as both a channel and a catalyst for militancy and resistance. “The indigenous workers were pioneers of industrial unionism in BC” and it was their example of racial solidarity and the commitment to worker control and justice that spawned subsequent attempts to organize waterfront workers, eventually leading to the formation of Local 38-57 of the International Longshoremen’s Association in 1913. That Local 526’s radicalism was subsumed by far stronger forces is no comment on its militant vision. For over a hundred years the IWW has survived in BC and around the world and has recently been revived by interest in cross racial solidarity and the commitment to organizing the unorganized into one big union. Its dream of workers’ control, of a world without bosses or masters, is still a powerful one for many people. The IWW’s dream, of which the Bows and Arrows Local in BC was a part, of creating a new world in the shell of the old continues to inspire radical resistance and aspiration today.

*City of Vancouver Archives-Mi P4-EmployeesHastingsSawMill\_DiverseWorkers-c1889-NIS*

**SOURCES:**

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