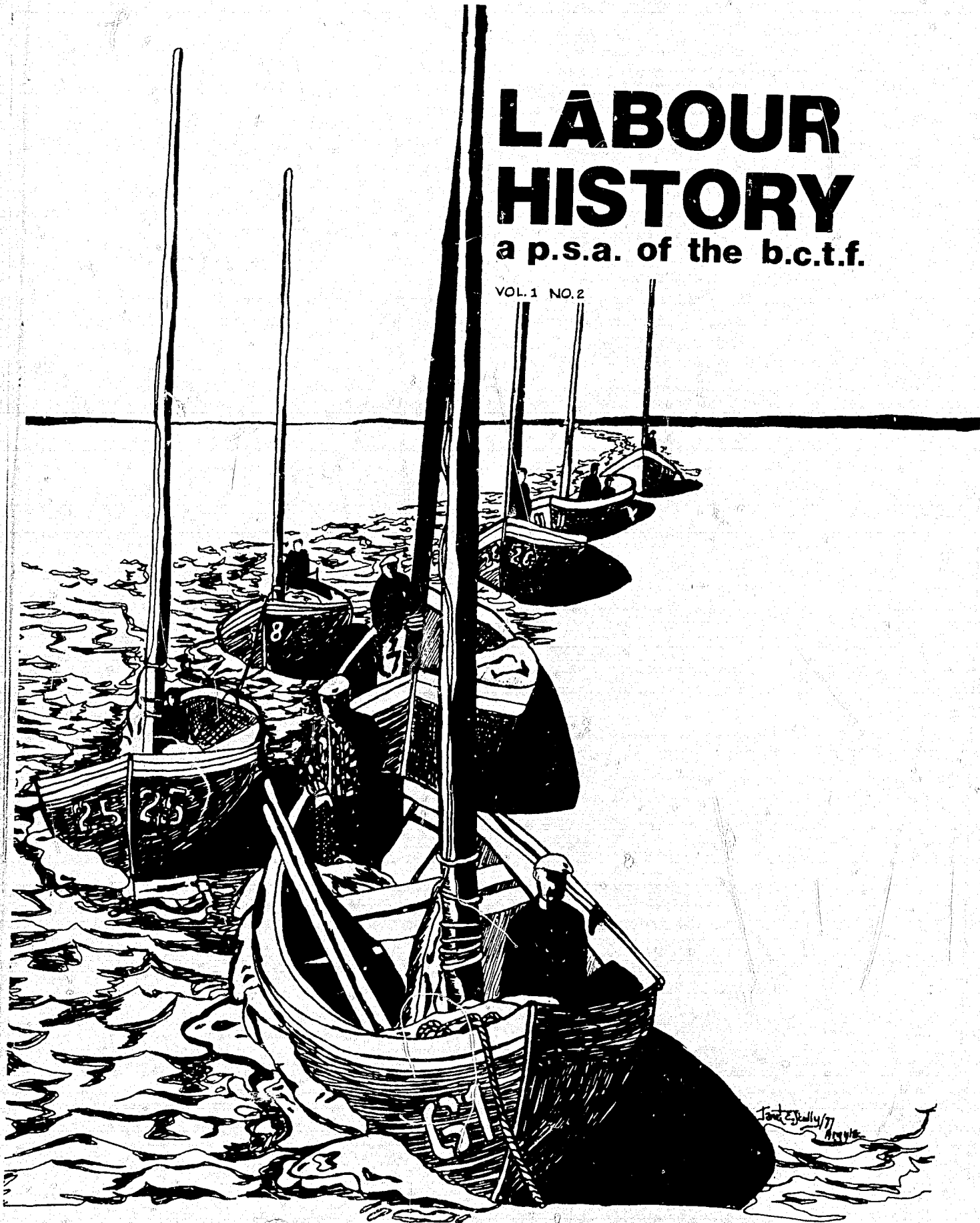


# LABOUR HISTORY

a p.s.a. of the b.c.t.f.

VOL. 1 NO. 2



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Brandak; Tom Morton; Frank Fuller; Linda Shuto

Labour History Newsletter, journal of the Labour History Provincial Specialists  
Association of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation.

layout by volunteer labour - printed in a union shop

## President's Message

FRANK L. FULLER

The summer is over and our association begins its second year of existence. Perhaps it is time to look at what we have done, where we are at, and our plans for the future.

At the beginning of last year we had little to offer the teachers of British Columbia. We were a new Provincial Specialist Association, untried and viewed with skepticism and some hostility by other members of the federation.

However, we went ahead and joined the P.S.A. Council and began to function. We negotiated a grant for the production of two slide/sound profiles on labour and published our first newsletter.

By the end of the summer our approach had begun to yield results. The young people we had commissioned for the job finished the two slide/sound shows with teachers manuals (see reviews in this issue). Both have been previewed by students and teachers from all over the province as well as labour and university educators in both Canada and the U.S.

"These Were the Reasons" was shown in August to high school students attending the United Nations Association workshop in Vancouver. Earlier it was shown at the Spring AGM. Both slide/sound shows have been shown to the officers of the B.C. Federation of Labour, the Vancouver Labour Council, and at international educational conferences in Portland, Oregon and Washington, D.C. Response was positive and enthusiastic.

We are beginning to receive inquiries about our materials and activities from a variety of sources including:

- a. Several school district resource centres.
- b. Community colleges
- c. Prof. M.J. Bain, Department of Education, McGill University. He is working to create curriculum material on labour for the Protestant Teachers Association of Quebec.
- d. Prof. James Thwaite of the University of Quebec at Rimouski, who is also working on labour studies curriculum.
- e. The education department of the Canadian Labour Congress.
- f. The Illinois Labour History Association.
- g. Labour and economics departments at the University of Maine and University of Oregon.

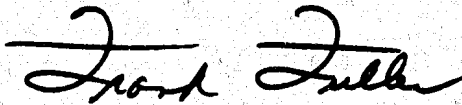
President's Message/cont'd

Our executive met in September to plan a programme for 1977-1978. Some of the pertinent points which were discussed include:

- a. The development of policy to get slide/sound shows and teaching manuals in school districts throughout the province. They will be made available to resource centres, teachers, the labour movement, and to other groups.
- b. The publishing of one, or possibly two, more newsletters.
- c. The involvement of our membership at the local level in developing curricula.

We hope you like this newsletter and find its contents useful in the classroom. Give us some feedback on our newsletters, and our slide/sound productions as soon as you are able to see them.

The slide sound shows are now available. Individuals or organizations interested in purchasing them should contact Dennis Ottewell, our Treasurer, for costs and other details.



Fraternally,

Frank Fuller  
President B.C.F.T. Labour  
History P.S.A.

NOTICE: The Canadian Labour Congress is holding an Education Seminar at Simon Fraser University, Saturday, Oct. 22 and Sunday, Oct. 23. Anyone interested in attending contact Art Kube CLC Education Director, 213 - 4925 Canada Way, Burnaby.



# LABOUR HISTORY

## A Provincial Specialist Association

OF THE B.C. TEACHERS' FEDERATION  
105 - 2235 Burrard Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3H9

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Cheryl Seaman's resignation from the executive has been accepted and thanks extended for her hard work in the Labour History, P.S.A. As a result of Cheryl's resignation nominations are now needed for the election of an executive officer. These should be submitted before Oct. 22, 1977 to:

Frank Fuller, Pres.,  
Labour History, P.S.A.  
c/o B.C. Teachers' Federation  
2235 Burrard  
Vancouver.

# mailBox

All letters and correspondence to the editor should be addressed to:

The Editor  
Labour History Newsletter  
c/o The B.C. Teachers Federation  
2235 Burrard St.  
Vancouver, B.C.

Letters must be signed, however, names are withheld upon request.

Dear Editor:

A ton of paper crosses my desk over a year. I seldom place a document in my briefcase for re-reading and for reference. I did place the Labour History P.S.A.'s first newsletter in my case, have re-read it. I have used it on two occasions as reference---readable, informative, and useful.

Bob Buzza  
General Secretary  
B.C.T.F.

Dear Editor:

The two slide tape presentations prepared by the B.C.T.F. Labour History P.S.A. tells in a simple yet powerful and interesting manner the story of both B.C. early labour struggles and those of the present day. Congratulations!

Len Guy  
B.C. Federation of  
Labour

Dear Editor:

Please pass my congratulations to all those involved in the development of our first newsletter. The layout is great, and the content is both interesting and valuable to me as a classroom teacher. Highlights for me are the lesson plans, bibliography and the I.W.A. article.

I can imagine the time which has been spent putting this together, and I want you to know that the time was well spent. I've discussed this with other teachers and they have found it interesting and useful.

Keep up the good work!

Cliff Boldt, Head Teacher  
Keith Lynn Elementary  
North Vancouver

Dear Editor:

Enjoyed first edition of the Labour History newsletter. Believe it is time that teachers who feel they are part of labour have a way of exchanging ideas.

Don Walmsley, Pres.,  
Hope Teachers' Assn.,  
Hope, B.C.

The following appeared in *The Sunshine Coast News*, July 5, 1977 in Gibsons, B.C. It was written by John Faustmann.

(Frank) Fuller's presentation, *These Were the Reasons*, was a twenty-five minute slide and tape show. It dealt with the history of union organization in British Columbia, spanning the years from the beginning of this century to the present date. Prepared by a group called B.C. Overtime, and done for the Labour History, P.S.A., the show was both exact and entertaining in the way it dealt with its subject.

Slides culled from the files of the Provincial Archives, and other sources, were excellent. Photographs of miners, loggers, and fishermen were interspersed with tapes of oldtimers recounting their experiences. There were shots, too, of Hunger Marchers, who demonstrated in Victoria in 1932, and the On To Ottawa Trek-kers, as well as ominous-looking photos of police and military men, armed with machine guns, who were brought in to quell the disorders.

A section also included in the presentations was one dealing with the history of women in the B.C. work force. Their fight to achieve equal pay for equal work brought the show up to the present time. The last section of *These Were the Reasons* ended the programme on a militant note. Farming and domestic workers are still unorganized in this province, and as a result, continue to work long hours for little pay.

## Fishing Literature

Howie White

*(This article is reprinted with special permission from Raincoast Chronicles First Five, Collector's Edition: Stories and History of the B.C. Coast. Howie White, Editor. The Collector's Edition is available from Harbour Publishing, Box 119, Madeira Park, B.C.)*

The sad truth is, there isn't very much. The writers who have been drawn by the balm and openness of the coast over the years have generally been too busy exclaiming over the blue mountains and indulging their imaginations in the Indian past to give much time to the present concerns of the people.

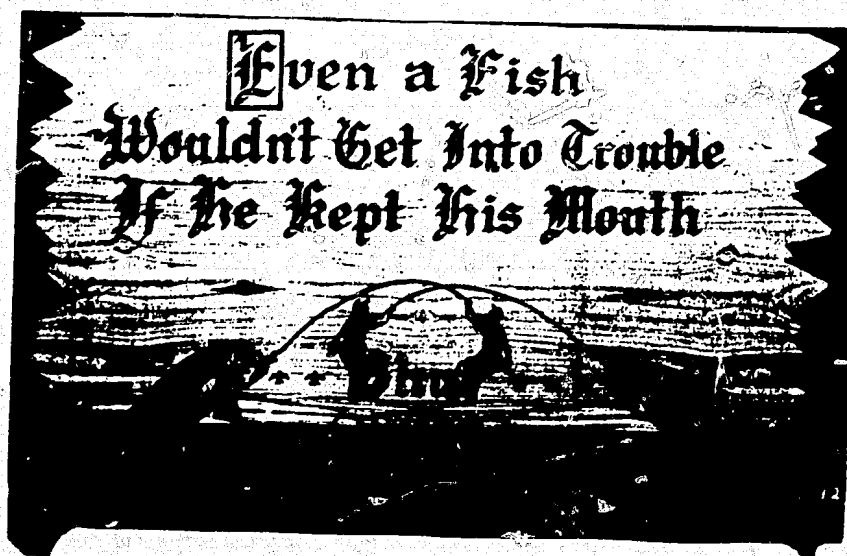
One who thought differently was Bertrand W. Sinclair, a Regina farm boy who went to Montana in the 1890s and together with magazine editor Betty Bower and painter Charles Russell helped launch the myth of the American cowboy. Tiring of that success, Sinclair came to Vancouver in 1908 and, seeing the trials of the small boat fisherman adventure equal to that of the cowboy, began writing a novel about the salmon industry which he hoped would catch on the same way.

*Poor Man's Rock* still stands as one of the most popular novels ever written on the B.C. coast, but fifty years later, Sinclair was still complaining that the westcoasters

lacked any sort of mythic dimension. "They take as much pride in their calling as men in other climes," he wrote in *The Fisherman* on his eightieth birthday, "but nowhere from California to Ketchikan is this pride embodied in song or simple homey story." His own life offers some clue as to the cause: in 1930 he went fishing himself and fished with passionate absorption until well past 80, sparing no further time or effort on his lucrative writing career. Living the life, he found, was better.

His only literary endeavour in later years was limited to songs and heroic verse about west coast fishermen which he wrote for "broadcast" over the radiophone when the boats were on the grounds.

*Poor Man's Rock* is too melodramatic to inspire any thought of revival today, but it is realistic enough about the fishing industry of that time, from the handliners up to the cannery amalgamators, to have historical value. It is also an historical event





## Fisherman's Lament

Written at Rivers Inlet by Ross Cumbers in 1939; Tune: P.J. Thomas

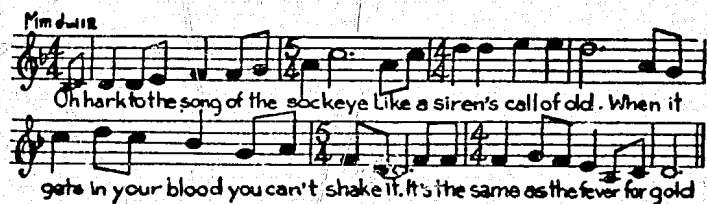
The Song of the Sockeye or Fisherman's Lament was found by Nick Guthrie about 1960 at a deserted cannery on Rivers Inlet. The cannery was probably Wadham's and the verse had been preserved for some twenty years on a glass-covered noticeboard outside the office. In Vancouver I luckily tracked down the author, Ross Cumbers, who told me he had gill-netted for seventeen years before returning to carpentry.

Ross Cumbers had written a few songs with his brother when they rode the rods

together in the mid-1930's, but had not sung the *Fisherman's Lament*. By the time I found him I had put a tune to his words, and while we had a beer together I sang him the song. I was pleased that he liked the way it sounded.

Whenever people who have fished this coast commercially have heard this song, they invariably are moved by its truthful portrayal of their experience.

-Phil Thomas



There's a hole in the B.C. coastline,  
River's Inlet's the place I mean,  
It's there you will find the old time  
And also the fellow who's green.

The boats head for there like the sockeye  
And some are a joy to the eye  
While others are simply abortions  
That ought to be left high and dry.

They go to the different canneries  
And before they can make one haul  
It's three hundred bucks for net, grub and gas  
Which they hope to pay off before fall.

Then it's off to the head of the inlet  
At six o'clock Sunday night  
But when morning comes and you've got about three,  
The prospects don't look very bright.

Of course there's always an alibi  
To account for a very poor run—  
The weather is wrong, the moon's not full,  
Or the big tides will help the fish come.

Along about dusk when you're starting to doze  
And think you've got a good night's set,  
An engine will roar as you look out the door  
As some "farmer" tows into your net.

And some of them think of the future  
While others have things to forget,  
But most of us sit here and think of a school  
Of sockeye hitting the net.

Then when the season is over  
And you figure out what you have made,  
You were better off working for wages,  
No matter how low you were paid.

For the comforts of home are worth something,  
So take it from me, my friend,  
Frying-pan grub and no head room  
Will ruin your health in the end.

(Repeat first verse)

from B.C. Library Quarterly.



## BackGround

### FISHERMAN'S LAMENT

Phil Thomas

The sockeye salmon with its red colour, its firm flesh and its choice flavour is a highly prized commercial fish on the Northwest coast. Canning began in British Columbia in the 1870's and by 1900 the fishing industry was packing annually millions of cases of salmon. By then the industry was dominated by consolidated packing companies, employing seasonal workers. The main change in this pattern today is that while the packing business is even more concentrated, the fishermen and shoreworkers are will integrated for bargaining through their union, the U.F.A.W.U. (The United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union).

All five species of salmon of the Northwest coast have a common destiny in that they hatch in fresh water, proceed to the Pacific Ocean and at maturity return to spawn in the waters where they hatched. Fish of all but one species then die. The sockeye, a fish which does not readily take bait, is caught at maturity at the mouths of rivers as it proceeds on its spawning migration.

So strong is the fish's urge to go forward that when a broad-meshed net is placed in front of it, a migrating sockeye will force its head into the net opening, ensnaring itself by the gills.

The gill-net is set out behind the boat, supported by a line of sinkers at the bottom. It is about six hundred feet long and twenty to thirty feet deep. The nets were hauled in by hand until large wooden drums on which they could be wound were fitted to

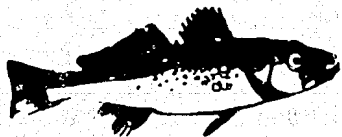
engine-powered boats. As the net was brought aboard, the enmeshed fish were removed, to be transferred later to a cannery packing boat.

The economic position of the gill-net fisherman is parallel to that of a farmer. The farmer depends on a return from his/her labour and the investment made in land and equipment. The fisherman hopes for a return on his/her labour by using a boat and a net. For the short Rivers Inlet sea-

son in 1939, a fisherman required about three hundred dollars to invest in a net, food and fuel. Today it costs over one thousand dollars for the six week season.

The prototype of the west coast gill-net fishing boat was the Columbia River skiff, the first of which was built about one hundred years ago by an unknown craftsman. The early boats were wome twenty feet long, heavily built, with broad beam and a slightly raised bow. Before engines were common, the cannery-owned skiffs

were towed to the fishing grounds by a packing boat. The fishermen would stay on the grounds for the regulated fishing week, which was from 6:00 P.M. Sunday until Friday when they would be towed back to the cannery. Shelter on these boats was under a piece of canvass stretched over an oar, fastened to the mast, and the cooking was done on a primus stove. When engines and cabins were added to the skiffs, although there was greater mobility and independence for the fisherman, living conditions on board were cramped and unhealthy. Now boats are often over thirty feet long and are much more satisfactory to live in.



#### SCHEDULE OF WAGES AND PERCENTAGES

AS PREPARED BY THE

#### Fishermen's Protective Union

OF THE

PACIFIC COAST AND ALASKA

FOR THE

Season of 1903

\*Graphic from *Fish & Ships* by A.K. Larson, Superior Publishing Co., Seattle, Wa.

## REVIEWED:

### 1. These Were the Reasons

George Matthews

*George Matthews is the Chairperson of Professional Development and Past President of the Sechelt Teachers' Association. He has had experience as a member of the Labour Relations Department, General Motors Corp., Oshawa, Ontario. Mr. Matthews teaches at Elphinstone Secondary School in Gibsons.*

It is generally easier to produce a credible and widely acceptable account of an historical event or period if the event is beyond the living memory of the oldest citizen. If the event burns deeply into the emotional memory of the people it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to treat the material with the cold, dispassionate eye which the historian must, of necessity, bring to his/her task. The Labour History P.S.A.'s first major effort--a slide-tape presentation called *These Were the Reasons*--becomes all the more impressive when viewed in the light of its courageous attempt to deal with the controversial and politically sensitive issue of the development of labour unions in Canada.

This technically high quality twenty-five minute production was intended as a lesson aid to be used in introducing the topic of labour unions in Canada to both high school students and members of unions. Beginning with a series of interviews with high school students answering the question: "What do you think of labour unions?" the presentation journeys back to the early days of union organization in the primary industries of logging, mining and fishing, mostly in Western Canada. A collection of high quality and dramatic photographs explores working conditions in these industries from the turn of the century through World War I, the twenties, thirties, World War II, right up to the implementation of wage controls in the 1970's. The audio portion of the presentation is an interesting and fast moving mix of commentary and interviews with people who survived the long and tortuous history of trade unions in Canada.

The format is neither new nor particularly imaginative, but students will no find

the material boring or trite. The slides are keyed to on-tape beeps and the ability to stop the tape from time to time to respond to or ask questions will be important. A teacher's guide accompanying the film should also prove useful in clarifying some of the questions which will undoubtedly arise from the material. The production staff would be well advised to add notations to the photographs indicating the time and place of each item, as many students may be inclined to confuse pictures of conditions in 1910 with those in 1940.

A sophisticated audience will undoubtedly discern a number of weaknesses in the presentation. Radical trade unionists will criticize the understatement of the material and the anti-union critics will be inclined to label it propagandistic. The ambivalence of the production is fairly obvious. They appear to have been unsure as to whether they were to produce a document justifying the existence of trade unions, or one which described their historical development. Any attempt to justify the existence of unions today on the basis of the terrible conditions of thirty, forty or fifty years ago is plainly naive, as the case against the power of unions today hardly ever implies criticism of early union organization. The role of women in early trade unionism is also largely ignored, except for an all too brief discussion of the "equal pay for equal work" issue, and the role of workers' wives. As a propaganda piece, therefore, the presentation is unsuccessful. It lacks objectivity. It steers clear of the politically sensitive issues of American domination of international unions in Canada and the red baiting which developed among unions after World War II. A contemporary

labour union audience would probably find these subjects offensive and the producers' unwillingness to deal with these problems detracts from the objectivity which most intelligent and aware students will expect.

The wage control issue is not handled well and students will have difficulty appreciating labour's genuine concern with the problem. The more curious and sensitive students will miss comments from the employer class. The people interviewed are old trade unionists and it would have been interesting to hear the comments of early employers, owners and managers trying

to justify their actions in those terrible times.

With all its defects, however, *These Were the Reasons* is an important contribution to the threadbare collection of material on the important topic of trade unionism in Canada. Unions in Canada are under attack--an attack based largely on myth and ignorance. Only one-third of the workers in this country are protected by unions, most of our students will become members of the Canadian working class; all of our students need a knowledge of what unions are and where they came from. *These Were the Reasons* is a beginning in that educational process.

## 2. Strike!

Linda Shuto

*Linda Shuto is Geographic Representative of the Burnaby Teachers' Assn.*

Those who have viewed and appreciated the first slide-tape programme produced for the Labour History P.S.A. are in for an even greater treat with the second production. *Strike!* provides a labour perspective of the causes and consequences of strikes. Pictures of actual strikes in B.C., voices of the workers actually involved, and commentary by local labour leaders are creatively mixed with the song "Talking Union Blues".

The use of a strike as one of the few economic levers available to working people is stressed, but examples of unfair working conditions and the establishment of first contracts are also cited as reasons for strikes. Recent disputes such as Denny's and Shoppers' Drug Mart are examined as well as the historical significance of sit-down strikes of the '30's. The slide-tape describes the democratic procedures that lead up to strikes and it indicates the disadvantages of strike action which cause it to be a last resort.

Lockouts and injunctions are defined from a labour point of view and the role of the police is mentioned briefly, creating an interesting perspective that is sure to invite further classroom discussion.

Media coverage of strikes is portrayed

as providing a less than full account of the reasons for the strike, but further analysis is left to supplementary student activities.

The Teacher's Guidebook is an excellent accompaniment to the slide-tape set. It provides for in-depth discussion and examination of issues raised in the show. Clear learning objectives are established, many terms are defined, and several interesting and creative activities are designed. A play, a radio show, and a negotiation table are setting outlined for student role playing.

Two different ways that injunctions were used in actual strikes are examined and charts are used to depict the progression of events. A personal account of a striker's story and opposing media articles of the Winnipeg General Strike prompt students to critically examine individual and public attitudes towards strikes.

*Strike!* is an excellent classroom tool and a congratulations is due Howie Smith, Patti Weir, and Ian Cameron who produced it for our P.S.A.

/cont'd page 10



### 3. The Canadian Worker

Tom Morton

*THE CANADIAN WORKER.* Catherine Lambie and Peter Watson. Thomas Nelson & Sons. Toronto, 1974.

A Canadian high school student might well think that the Canadian Pacific Railway was immaculately conceived from the head of Sir John A. MacDonald, or that strikes were settled in the headlines of newspapers, so seldom are the people who built the railroad or the background to strikes mentioned in the classroom. Though the school itself is a workplace, workers' history or workers' studies are not subjects and have few curriculum resources. So it is welcome indeed when resources are produced.

*The Canadian Worker* is a good book. It covers Canadian labour history, strikes, labour and politics, labour organizations, women, white collar workers and reforms of working conditions.\* A number of formats are used: stories, newspaper accounts and pictures. The type is quite large. Most important, the questions and layout are excellent. Many questions should elicit debate through skillful wording and through such techniques as juxtaposing newspaper headlines and photographs or values. Other questions involve the use of skills in reading graphs and maps, and in analyzing photographs. Frequent use is made of historical and contemporary photographs and source documents. I especially enjoyed the inclusion of the words to the labour song, "Solidarity Forever".

The layout, however, does weaken the section on the Winnipeg General Strike. In the other sections where the written text is only a few pages in length, the questions are interspersed and this works very well. The section on the 1919 strike covers ten pages and is a powerful story. Yet, as I read it, I lost the continuity of the story because it was frequently broken up by the layout. This may preserve comprehension of the issues, but it endangers the narrative.

Another question for this book, as for any other, is that of bias: what is said and not said--shades of meaning. First of all, it is pleasing that it is a fairly com-

prehensive text and that it is Canadian. (The Maritimes, however, are unfortunately only mentioned once--by reference to an article in the St. John *Telegraph-Journal*, which was, in fact, a reprint of a *Toronto Star* article.) Women in the work force are discussed. Yet other things are left out. For example, there is no mention of the company profits being a factor in worker-management negotiations. The section at the end of the book on changes in working conditions does not really deal with the issues of control over the workplace or how the structure of capital investment produces unemployment.

I have a general concern, like many teachers, about any school text concerned with social issues. How well can a textbook, a printed medium with questions on comprehension, graphs, etc., convey the power of oppression, of struggle, of solidarity? Will the vitality of this history necessarily be drained in the typically dry form of the textbook? My own answer is that teachers will need to supplement *The Canadian Worker* with first person accounts, discussions of local work situations, etc. But this book does stand up very well. It contains a good deal of dynamic material and has a positive attitude towards working people. After so many years of so few curriculum resources, *The Canadian Worker* is very welcome.

\*The reading and interest levels of *The Canadian Worker* are broad enough to be useful in all of the junior secondary and intermediate grades.



"Tut, tut, girls...We didn't reach our quota yet..."



## SourceSourceSourceSc

George Brandak

There are some publications that are of considerable assistance in the location of labour history sources. The *Union List of Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories*, (Revised 1975 edition) prepared by the Public Archives of Canada, contains information on the general contents of individual collections of 215 institutions in Canada. A supplement for 1976 has been completed. Owing to the cost of the ULM (\$50), it should be scanned during a visit to a research centre. *Primary Sources in Canadian Working Class History, 1860 - 1930* (R.G. Hann, et. al., Kitchener: Dumont Press, 1973) lists newspapers, pamphlets and government documents as well as manuscripts available in various institutions. *Canadian Newspapers in the UBC Library*, (U.B.C. Library Reference Guide 52, 1974) lists many newspapers published in British Columbia. *Theses on British Columbia History and Related Subjects* (F. Woodward, Vancouver: U.B.C. Library, 1971) lists theses completed on labour history. An updated version is being prepared. A list of theses completed in 1974 has been published in *B.C. Studies*, No. 28 (Winter 1975/76) and a list for those completed in 1975 was published in *B.C. Studies*, No. 33 (Spring, 1977). *Major Manuscripts Collections Relating to Canadian Studies in the Libraries of Simon Fraser University, University of B.C. and University of Victoria* (Tri-University Libraries of B.C., 1975) contains further information on specific collections. Unfortunately, the U.B.C. and T.R.U.I.L. publications are out of print and should be consulted at institutions that have already obtained copies. The Summer 1977 issue of *Archivaria* has a labour history theme and contains a detailed article on holdings of labour sources in the U.B.C. Library, Special Collections Division. It can be obtained by applying for membership to the Association of Canadian Archivists.\* Information in Canadian labour history research and publications can be obtained from *The Bulletin* of the Canadian Historical Association and their journal *Labour/Le Travailleur*. A subscription is \$11.00 for two years and can be gotten from Mr. G. Kealy, *Labour/Le Travailleur*, c/o Dept.

of History, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H 3J5.

\*A.C.A. Membership, University Archives, Univ. of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, S7N 0W0. \$15 general, \$5 students

### LABOUR STUDIES, ONTARIO

*Below is a brief review prepared for the Ontario Federation of Labour by John Church.*

*Labour Studies Units*, prepared for the Ontario Federation of Labour by Eric Holmes and Neil McKinnell, Brantford College, and Greg Murtash, Ontario Federation of Labour, was published in February 1976. Nine units cover themes as diversified as "Unions Today," "Labour and the Law," "Labour and Politics," and "Labour and the Future." One area to date neglected will be redressed in the fall when a tenth unit, "Women in the Work Force" becomes available.

In its rationale, the document notes the "sad neglect" of the study of "underlying social-historical" basics in Canada's development. The rationale adds that "indeed, the failure to develop Canadian social history adequately has left us with little more than biases, fleeting perceptions and even blatant misinformation of that single largest component of the Canadian mosaic-the working man." (sic)

The rationale adds:

"This program is designed to remedy in part that imbalance by looking at history from the bottom up rather than from the traditional top down. In approaching the subject this way, students, in their formative years will receive factually more accurate information, allowing them to develop a more objective appreciation of labour, its history, activities, values and aspirations."

Perhaps one important message is included in the advice that "users are free to duplicate materials except for commercial purposes." Original copies may be obtained from the Ontario Federation of Labour, 15 Gervais Drive, Don Mills, Ontario M3C 1Y8

# Labour History Collections

prepared by george brandak

The following is a list of holdings available from the Special Collections Division of the University of British Columbia. These are a rich source for labour material, and Mr. George Brandak, Curator of Manuscripts in the Special Collections Division, can give valuable assistance to those visiting U.B.C.



Photo courtesy of Vancouver Public Library

AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION, Division, 101, 134 & 1242

Records, 1898-1970

Financial records, minutes, correspondence and membership lists of the Vancouver, New Westminster and Penticton Divisions. UBC.

ANGLO-BRITISH COLUMBIA PACKING COMPANY

Records, 1891-1967

Financial records and correspondence relating to fish canneries. UBC.

BRITISH COLUMBIA ELECTRIC RAILWAY COMPANY

Records, 1861-1961

Correspondence, minutes, financial records and labour agreements of the company and related utility and transportation firms. UBC.

CHARLTON, Ormand Lee

Original papers, 1891-1935

Correspondence, documents, newspaper clippings and photos relating to co-operatives and political movements. UBC.

CUMYOW, Won Alexander, 1861-1955. Civic employee.

Original papers, 1888-1935

Correspondence, journals, documents and photos relating to his business, personal and civic duties which included the position of interpreter for the Vancouver City Police. UBC

DOYLE, Henry, 1874-1961. Industrialist.

Original papers, 1864-1958

Correspondence, reports, statistical information and photos relating to the fishing industry. UBC.

*LH Collections cont'd.*

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD, est. 1905  
Records, 1912-1971

Minutes and financial records of the Vancouver Branch; clippings  
and other printed material relating to industrial unionism. UBC.

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF MINE, MILL & SMELTER WORKERS (CANADA)  
Records, 1900-1967

Correspondence, financial records, agreements, sound recordings and  
printed material. (Includes records from Trail, Britannia and Kimberley  
1945-1966, the B.C. locals of the Western Federation of Miners 1916-1918,  
and the One Big Union.)

JAPANESE-CANADIAN MATERIAL  
Papers.

Sound recordings, printed material, correspondence and photos relating  
to the life of the Japanese in Canada (many in the Japanese language).

LADNER, Thomas Ellis, 1836-1922. Entrepreneur  
Original papers, 1892-1896

Letterbook pertaining to his activities as manager of the  
Wellington Packing Company at Canoe Pass near Ladner, B.C. UBC.

McGINNIS, Angus, 1884-1964. Politician.

Original papers, 1900-1960

Correspondence, reports and documents relating to his political  
career and his legal involvement on behalf of the B.C. Government  
in the Western Freight Rates Case in the 1920's. UBC.

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF B.C. est. 1961.

Records, 1948-1971

Minutes, correspondence, financial records, sound recordings and  
printed material including CCF and CCF-NDP transitional material. UBC.

ORCHARD, Chauncy Donald, 1893-1972. Forester.

Original papers, ca. 1900-1963

Correspondence, reports, printed material, recordings, relating  
to the forest history in B.C. UBC.

TOLMIE, Simon Fraser, 1867-1937. Premier of B.C.

Original papers, ca. 1918-1937

Correspondence, reports, addresses and clippings. UBC.

VANCOUVER TRADES AND LABOUR COUNCIL.

Records, 1889-1956

Minutes and clippings, including minutes of the Refinery Oil  
Workers' Union, 1918-1921. UBC.

*Owing to the fragile nature of many of the documents and restrictions placed by  
some of the donors, photocopying is limited. It is suggested that teachers research  
the area in which they are interested rather than bring students to use the mat-  
erials.*

*For further information, write George Brandak, Special Collections, The Library,  
U.B.C. or phone 228-2521 or 228-5877.*

# Lesson Plan

## Fishermen and Unions Working Together, Struggling Together

M. Bostwick

*This lesson plan is designed to provoke discussion regarding the fishing industry, the necessity for an organized workforce, and some of the problems involved in organizing an industry like the fishermen.*

I heard someone say the other day, "I don't see why fishermen belong to a union. All they do is buy a boat and go fishing. They spread their nets or drop their lines and catch fish. The fish are sold to somebody for a lot of money. Fishing is a job like any other job."

Wrong. The fishing industry is a lot more complicated than that.

What do fishermen do?

Fishermen do not work in a store or plant like most other workers. Their workplace is 13,000 miles of water along the B.C. coast. The search for salmon and halibut is seasonal work. That is to say they can only catch fish at certain times of the year. The number of work days is regulated by the government as a conservation measure.

Some years there are a lot of fish to be caught. Some years there aren't very many. No fishermen can count on making a lot of money every year.

The demand for fish is irregular. Sometimes fish buyers want a lot of fish. Sometimes they don't want very many. Thus, the price of fish can go way up or way down. Unless a fishermen's union can bargain for a fair price, no fisherman knows whether he or she will make enough money to pay his or her expenses. Salmon, in particular, is a luxury item. And this means when shoppers don't have a lot of money, not nearly as much salmon is sold.

There is a wide variety of types and species of fish. This means each fisherman

has to specialize. Each boat has only the kind of gear and equipment to catch a few kinds of fish in a few kinds of ways.

Fishing is hard, dangerous work. When the fish are running everyone works as fast and as hard as possible. Our rocky coast and dangerous waters make fishing a risky business. Bad weather, fog, and so forth can also place the fish boats in danger.

Fish spoil easily. The boats carry ice or refrigeration equipment to preserve the catch. Many fishermen sell to a buyer who has established a "fish camp" somewhere on an island near the fishing grounds. The individual fisherman usually doesn't have much choice about who he or she sells to. This gives the buyer (who always wants to pay as little as possible) the advantage over the fishermen--unless there is a union agreement on prices.

### *Fishermen and Unions.*

Many people were surprised that fishermen got together and organized unions in the early part of this century. Some of the reasons why people thought unions unsuitable for the industry include:

(1) Fishermen are self-employed. They do not have a foreman or a boss around telling them what to do every minute. So it seemed that each fisherman was his or her own boss and did not need the protection which a group of workers can get by joining a union.

(2) Most fishermen are separated from one another. They often live and work at widely scattered places along the coast. So it



Lesson Plan/cont'd from page 14

seemed unlikely that they could ever get together to form a union.

(3) People of many different nationalities became fishermen and it was thought that Finns did not get along with Yugoslavs, Norwegians didn't get along with Japanese, or whites with Native Indians. These people lived in different towns and communities and spoke different languages. So it seemed they would have a hard time getting along together.

(4) Most fishermen have their own boats which may be worth as much as \$100,000 (including licenses). So fishermen did not seem poor either.

(5) Fishermen compete with each other. What one fisherman catches, the other does not. How could individuals competing with each other to catch the same fish get along with each other?

(6) The companies who buy fish--packers and canners--were big and powerful. They could prevent fishermen from getting together to demand higher prices for fish. If any fisherman did not like the price offered--tough luck. If fishermen got together, the companies could try to divide the workers.

(7) Many fishermen owed money to the companies that bought fish. If fishermen formed a union, the companies could threaten to repossess the boats purchased with loans. And when they offered a loan to an individual it was possible to demand that the boatowner promise to sell fish to the company. Since the size of the catch and the price of the fish varied from one year to the next, many fishermen were constantly in debt.

(8) Changes in equipment and machinery seemed to make the companies even stronger. Larger, better fish packers could serve more fishing boats and travel greater distances. This equipment was expensive and only a few very big companies could afford them. This meant the fishermen faced fewer and fewer fish buyers. This narrowed the choice of the fishermen. Either they sold to the big companies or this did not sell at all. And at the same time the improvements in fishing boats were also expensive and fishermen had to go deeper into debt. This indicated that the companies were so strong that most fishermen would be afraid to join a union which the companies did not like.

#### *Why did fishermen form unions?*

Despite all the pressures against the organization of a union in the fishing industry, the workers did form the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. The U.F.A.W.U. became one of the most militant unions in the province. How did they overcome all the difficulties?

(1) Even though fishermen went out to fish alone, they sold their catch to the same few companies. These companies were the "boss" and by joining together the fishermen could collectively, as a group, bargain with the boss for better prices. It was in their interest to join a union.

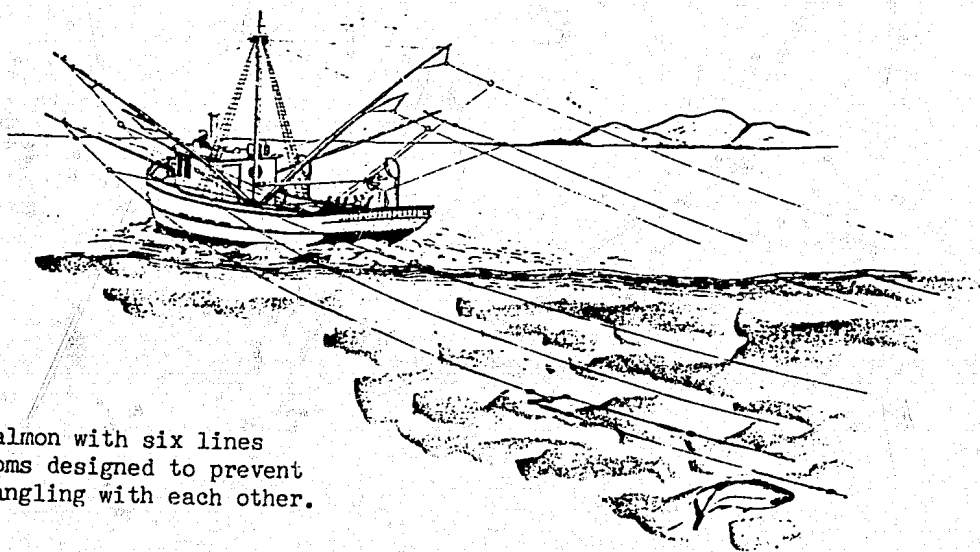
(2) Most fishermen were not rich. Even those who use an expensive boat are not rich if they are deeply in debt. And the bank which loans the fisherman money wants repayment on a regular basis--whether or not the season was a good one. In order to pay off their debts, fishermen wanted as high a price as possible for their catch and some expectation that the price would not go up or down too much. The desire for economic security was an important incentive to form a union.

(3) When gasoline and diesel powered boats were introduced, fishermen could travel farther up and down the coast. Thus fishermen were not so separated from one another. In addition, they came together each evening at the fish camps where they sold fish. Here they could talk about common problems and look for common solutions. This encouraged them to work together.

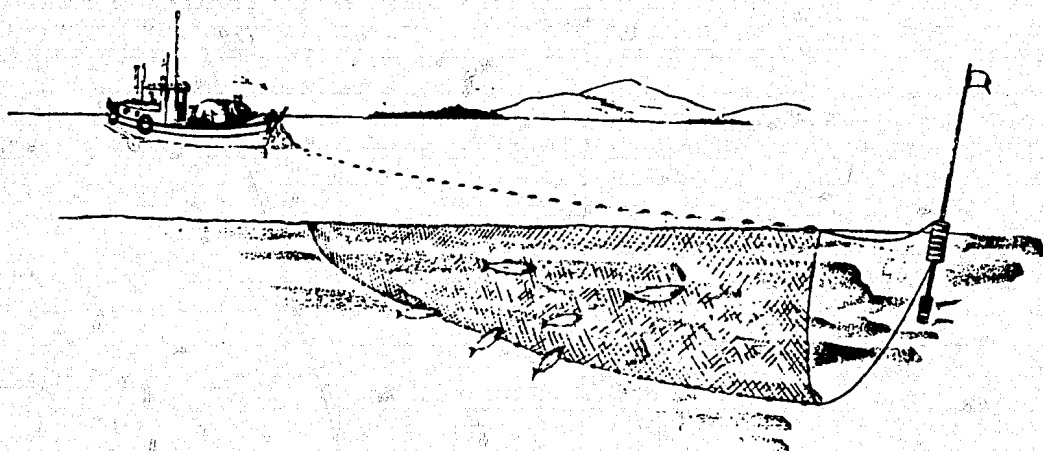
(4) When people work in the same industry together they get along better. Keeping a fish boat in working order requires a lot of skill. One has to be an electrician, a carpenter, a mechanic, as well as a fisherman. When people work together to solve a common problem it doesn't make much difference if one's parents are from Finland or Yugoslavia. And remember that fishing is a very dangerous occupation and one's life depends on help from others in times of trouble.

(5) The union itself brings people together. Unions encourage solidarity--group loyalty and support. A union encourages friendships and working together for the common good. This made the differences in nationality

## == Some Commercial

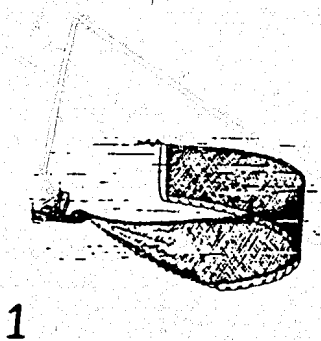


*Trolling* for salmon with six lines strung from long booms designed to prevent the spinners from tangling with each other.

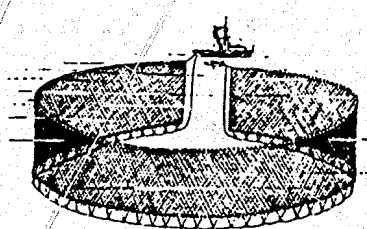


A *gill-net* being laid across a water-course. The mesh admits the head of a fish that swims into it, but catches on the gills.

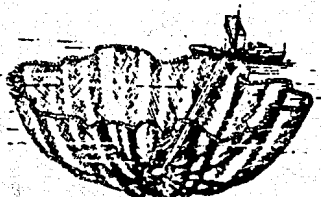
## Fishing Methods In B.C.



1

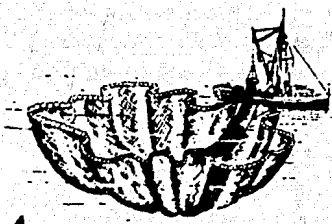


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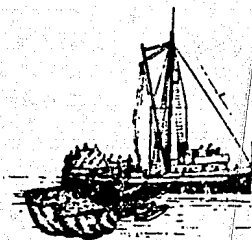


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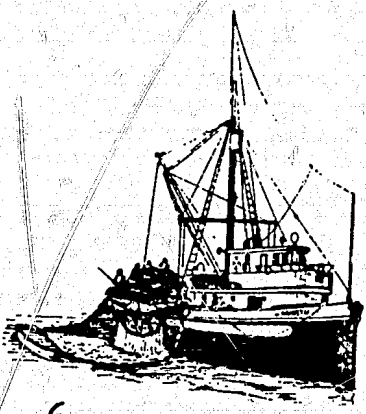
A purse-seiner surrounds a school of fish with a net (Drawings 1 & 2). Next, he draws a line to close the bottom of the purse (3 & 4). Then he hauls in and hoists the fish aboard (5 & 6).



4.



5.



6.

Lesson Plan/cont'd from page 14

less important. Working together just seemed more important.

(6) Pressure and opposition from the companies which bought fish made it more likely that the workers would get together. When the company comes down on you, there are only two choices: either give up and split, or get together and fight. The bigger and more powerful the companies became, the more necessary it was for fishermen to get together on their side.

Over the years fishing became a career, not simply something one did off and on. The person who has borrowed money to buy a good boat, who has the skills to fish, who knows the good fishing grounds, is not about to simply give up the first time a company tries to put on the pressure. The experience of the fishermen was that they had to join together. There wasn't any choice.

(7) Finally, the union is more than a weapon to use in bargaining with the companies. A

union is an organization which working people find is their own. It is organized and run by and for people like themselves. And a union is one way in which workers can relate to other workers in other industries. The fishermen, because they come from so many backgrounds, have always had a strong sense of responsibility for other workers in Canada. What union members want for themselves, they want for all people.

If you look at the two lists above, it might seem that the reasons why workers could not form a union are almost as persuasive as the reasons why they should form a union. We know that they did form a union. And perhaps the factors which made the difference were the strong opposition which only made the fishermen more determined, good leadership and the sharing of many battles and struggles together. Working and fighting together are always what makes a trade union strong.



The following five tape documentaries have been produced by B.C. Overtime with assistance from the BOAG foundation. Each programme is based on first-hand accounts from the people involved, news clippings and music from the community being documented. Each is one half hour long.

When ordering, please specify reel-to-reel or cassette. If reel, also specify choice of tape speed (3.75 or 7.5) and choice of  $\frac{1}{2}$  track or  $\frac{3}{4}$  track.

The price is \$30.00 per programme. All orders must be accompanied by a cheque, money order or authorized purchase order. Please add 7% provincial sales tax. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

BC OVERTIME  
333 Carrall St.  
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 2J4  
(604) 689-7728



**THE BIG STRIKE** - the two year Vancouver Island coal strike as told by the miners and their children who lived through it in 1912. Includes: working conditions in the early 1900's, how the strike started, incidents and hardships during the strike, the government's use of police and militia, how the strike ended, and how the people who went through it feel about it now.

**THE LOGGERS NAVY** - the story of the men and boats that organized B.C.'s logging camps and thereby paved the way for industry-wide organization. Includes: the personal accounts of three union organizers about the logging camps, the working conditions, the important struggles, and the use of the "navy" in organizing their union during the depression and World War II; also includes clippings and poetry from the pages of the B.C. Lumber Worker, and music from the loggers' community.



Fishing Literature/cont'd from page 5

in its own right, having left a deeper mark on people's imagination than its author perhaps gave it credit for.

In any case Sinclair was the first and last writer to conceive of a literature of B.C. coast fishing; apart from a children's book by Roderick Haig-Brown called *Salt Water Summer* and *Mist on the River* by Sinclair's old friend Hubert Evans which has a memorable section on cannery life, all subsequent work on the subject has been non-fictional and functional.

The most professional all-around history available is Hugh McKervill's *The Salmon People*, which begins with a discussion of aboriginal fishing customs and techniques and progresses through to modern times in a readable, if not altogether thorough fashion. The book is dotted with cute anecdotes (it's family reading all the way) and the chapter on Rivers Inlet is especially knowledgeable and fascinating.

West coast fishing has proven one of the most political of Canada's industries, a fact that is evident in three well produced histories, *Salmon: Our Heritage*, produced by the major company; *A Ripple, A Wave*, published by the major union; and *Tides of Change*, published by the major co-op, each rehashing old disputes and directing the march of history in its sponsor's favour.

*Salmon: Our Heritage*, published by B.C. Packers Ltd., is an encyclopedic work of 750 pages compiled by longtime company secretary Cecily Lyons, dealing mainly with the canning side of the industry. Lyons was more of a record keeper than a writer and the book is more useful as a source of statistical information than for reading, but it is limited even in this use by poor indexing.

*A Ripple, A Wave*, published only this year, is a compact little paperback as singular about its purpose as the Lyons book is rambling, offering a swift review of the long and only partially successful struggle to bring coast fishermen together in one strong union.

*Tides of Change* is the only one of these fishing books written by an actual fisherman, and what a difference it makes. Vic Hill's announced purpose is simply to tell the story of the rise of the Prince Rupert Co-op from

a nickel-dime beginning with a few semi-literate Finns taking on the canning monopolies with a tacked together shack on floats, through years of blunders and bankruptcy to the multi-million dollar international operation of today. That story is appealing enough in itself to hold most people's attention, but in the course of telling it Hill manages to get over more of a feeling of what fishing is, from the overloaded troller in Hecate Straits trying to decide in the face of a rising southeaster whether to risk the dangerous beam sea home to Rupert or run before it way out around Rose Spit, to the quirks of New York fish shoppers, than all the other books put together.

The only other books somewhat like it are *As the Sailor Loves the Sea*, a memoir by an Alaskan fisherman's wife named Ballard Hadman, and *Guests Never Leave Hungry*, a tape-recorded autobiography containing recollections of fishing by the well-known B.C. seine skipper Jimmy Sewid. In these books the northwest coast, so often portrayed as desolate and unknowable, emerges with recognizable face, worn familiar by human use. This is the sort of awareness that exists in the fishing industry and it's too bad so few writers have ever discovered it.

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B.C. Overtime/cont'd from page 18

**BLOODY SUNDAY** - what happened on June 19, 1938 when unemployed "sit downers" clashed with the police after a thirty day occupation of the Vancouver Post Office.

**VANCOUVER, THE DEVELOPER'S PRIZE** - the politics of Vancouver during the Hungry Thirties, when labour and socialist candidates tried to gain control of the city from the established interests.

**THE CHILDREN OF SOINTULA** - a historical look at the contributions made to trade unionism and socialism by the Finnish and other immigrant groups in B.C.

# Organize the Canneries — P.C.F.U. Must Do the Job!

J. Gavin, Sec'y PCFU

*The Pacific Coast Fishermen's Union (P.C.F.U.) was the predecessor of today's United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union (U.F.A.W.U.). One of the very important struggles of the 1930's was the drive to organize the cannery workers in British Columbia, most of whom were women - Native and Japanese. Through its newspaper, The Fisherman, the P.C.F.U. called upon members to join in the effort to organize all B.C. cannery workers. The following items appeared in The Fisherman, July 31, 1937.*



I believe that everyone knows that the Deep Bay Cannery was destroyed by fire last May.

We had a local of the cannery workers there last year and the cannery was 100% union till the day it burned down.

These workers are mostly Indian and Japanese women. Most of the Indian workers managed to get work in the canneries up north, and those who were unable to find work went back on the reserve.

But the Japanese women, not knowing the country, have no way of making a living.

I received a letter from the Indian Committee stating that these Japanese women are desperate. They expect the union to help them financially.

Last year, during the Rivers Inlet strike, and when the two fishermen were arrested, these same cannery workers donated what they could. According to what we hear the cannery is to be rebuilt, but it will not be ready this season.

In closing, I hope that the fishermen realize that if they want to build a strong union they must have the support of the Cannery workers.

Fraternally yours,

Nick Sawka

On page seven of this issue we carry a letter from Nick Sawka at Deep Bay, in which he points out the plight of the Japanese cannery workers who have had no work since the Deep Bay Packing Company burnt down. Faced with poverty and starvation, these workers, formerly members of the Fishermen's and Cannery Workers' Industrial Union, are now dependent upon the meager (if any) relief allowed to them by the government and the assistance of sympathetic fishermen. It is indeed a damning indictment of the present order of things when those who are most important in the production of food commodities, the workers, are turned loose to starve.

BUT MOST IMPORTANT IN THE LETTER RECEIVED FROM NICK IS HIS REMINDER THAT THE CANNERY WORKERS ARE THE NATURAL ALLIES OF THE FISHERMEN AND MUST BE ORGANIZED AS SUCH.

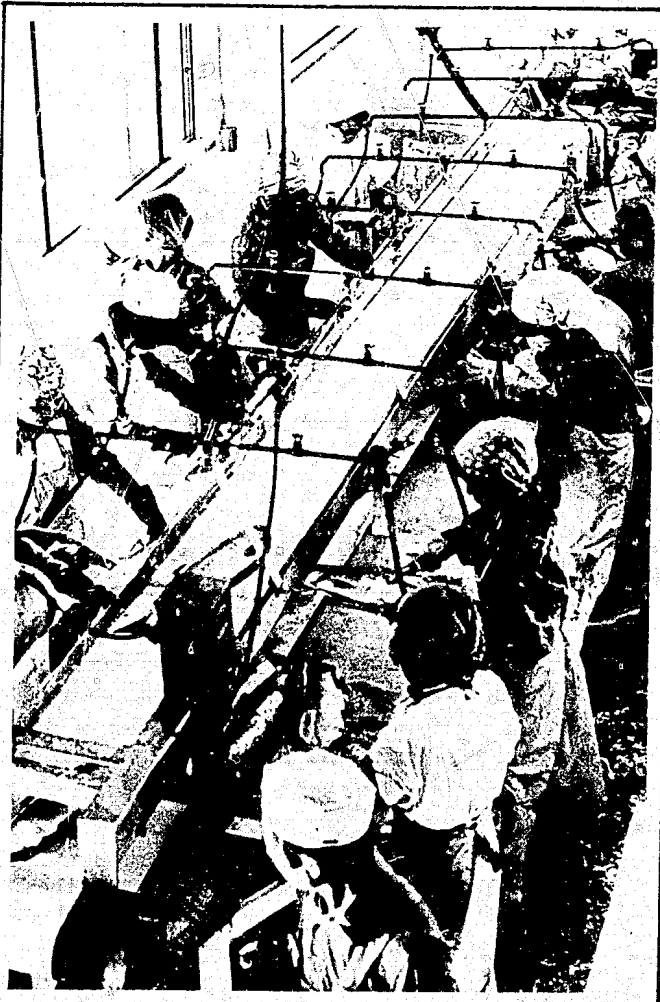
According to figures recently released by the Department of Fisheries, there were, in 1936, 5,362 workers employed in the canneries of British Columbia. 957 of these were white workers; 1,690 were Indians and 2,715 were of the oriental and other races.

These workers are terribly exploited and work for as low as 15 cents an hour. Organization for them would mean higher wages and better conditions.

And how would the fishermen gain if the cannery workers were organized?

The Fishermen, as primary producers of

fish, would be much stronger if the cannery workers, who prepare and can the fish, were in one union with them, and would stand by them in their collective bargaining with the cannery kings. It's all very simple when you come to figure it out. Both the fishermen and the cannery workers want better conditions and higher wages, and they work in the same industry. So why shouldn't they be in one union?



There are four reasons why our union, the Pacific Coast Fishermen's Union, is in the best position to take on the task of organizing them. Those reasons are as follows:

A. Because the P.C.F.U. has the largest membership of any fishermen's organization in B.C.

B. Because its constitution calls for organizing the unorganized.

C. Because the P.C.F.U. is in the position to grant special concessions re payment of dues by low paid workers.

D. Because the P.C.F.U. is a

democratic organization controlled by the rank and file.

This is our position on the matter and we are open and frank in giving our views. They must be organized and we will rise to the occasion. Our Union is one that holds no race or creed prejudices. We extend the hand of unity and organization to our Indian and Oriental brothers. A trade union embracing workers of different races, but all employed in one industry, is the broadest and most democratic form of organization. We must put our shoulders to the wheel.



While many strikes had taken place before the beginning of the century, particularly among the Island miners, the first great mass resistance to the bosses' efforts to force wages down occurred on the Fraser River. The fishermen had only been organized three months, but the union had been accepted so enthusiastically that the whole river was practically organized by the time the run was due.

Puget Sound canners were paying 28¢. The Fraser canners offered 20¢. The men demanded 25¢. As the canners refused to raise their price a strike was declared, and immediately between 7,000 and 8,000 fishermen and cannery workers became involved. The Japanese had their own union but were linked up with the rest of the fishermen through a Grand Lodge. White men and Indians belonged to the same locals in Vancouver, New Westminster, Steveston, Ladner and Eburne. When the strike was declared the headquarters was established at Steveston.

union. They said the union men were "mostly loafers from American territory, too glad of a chance to stir up trouble." "Twenty-five cents or no fish", became the slogan, but more than prices were involved. The fishermen, while pursuing their dangerous calling, were housed in cannery shacks worse than dog kennels. They could not live in their sailboats and had to live in the dumps provided for them by the canneries they fished for. The greed of the cannerymen brought about a condition on the river where more than half of the licenses were issued to Japanese, whom they could bully into fishing on their own terms more easily than the whites and Indians.

Fraudulent naturalization papers were secured by political trickery for Japanese immigrants only a few months in the country, and the threat of deportation held over them. The whites and the Indians were being squeezed out and demands for better living conditions and the restoration of former rights entered into the struggle also.

## FRASER RIVER: 1900

*This account of the famous Fraser River strikes at the turn of the century is reprinted from a 1937 issue of 'The Fisherman' and written by William Bennett.*

Immediately all the provocative tricks of the bosses came into play, to drive a wedge between the whites, Indians and Japanese. The food supply of the Japanese was cut off at the canneries. Bell Irving protested to the Indian Department at Victoria asking "that the Indians be warned not to take sides with the union men or any one else in the present trouble."

The leaders were proclaimed to be in the pay of the American canners who wanted to steal the market of the Fraser cannerymen, as they could not compete against the better quality Fraser sockeyes, although apparently they were able to pay 8¢ a fish more to the fishermen. The strikers as a whole were slandered and lied about as Tom McInnes lies about the loggers and longshoremen today.

The cannerymen refused to recognize the

No strike that has taken place in Vancouver since has been so heartily and thoroughly supported as the 1900 fishermen's strike, not even the loggers' strike of 1934. Almost everybody was on their side except the cannerymen, the newspapermen and the police. The whole labour movement, the City Council, the storekeepers and the small businessmen, were behind the strikers in their demands.

At the head of the strike were the two most outstanding working-class leaders of their time, Frank Rogers and Will McClain. Both of these men, members of the United Socialist Labour Party, knew that the workers never win everything except what they fight for and their leadership developed the militant spirit of the fishermen. Chief Kelly of Tsimpsonian Indians guaranteed the solidarity of the Indians, but pleaded with the

Fraser River/ cont'd from page 23

During the strike there had been no trouble, although the provincial police had shipped in carload after carload of specials. No damage had been done to property. The strikers had been orderly and acted only within their legal rights, but among the cannerymen were J.P.'s and police magistrates and they played their last card on the 23rd of July; they called out the militia.

The 6th D.C.O.R. arrived from Vancouver during the night and when day broke were in possession of Steveston. Leaving Vancouver at midnight on the Comox they were hooted

and jeered by the few people on the streets at that hour. At their head were men who were interested in the canneries, among them C.Gardiner Johnson and Duff Stuart.

The presence of these "sockeye soldiers" was enough to break the morale of some of the Japanese fishermen, and the strike was over for the season. A week later the men were fishing on the cannerymen's terms, but they maintained their union. The capitalist press figured the men had lost 240,000 days of work through the strike, but none of them figured how many days the militiamen lost.

The Special Collections Division of the UBC Library, the Provincial Archives of B.C., the Vancouver City Archives, and institutions acquiring archival material throughout the province relating to the history of the working class are interested in any documentation that requires a proper home. This includes records, letters, diaries, journals, minute books, photographs, etc. If anyone knows of such material, contact with any of these institutions would be very much appreciated.

#### Curriculum Development

The B.C.T.F., through funding from the Provincial Ministry of Labour, supported a summer student project to develop curriculum materials for the primary grades. Virginia Hama and Andy Brown have prepared a collection including a film, slide tape, three picture sets and a teacher's guide, all of which will (hopefully) be available through *Lesson Aids* this Fall. The materials are non-sexist, and multi-ethnic. The photo sets show women in non-traditional jobs, point out the unique contributions of many cultural groups and give a balanced picture of the ethnic composition of Vancouver. The slide tape introduces the concepts of teasing and prejudice, and primary children discuss how they feel when they are teased, and why people tease and hurt one another.

*Photo Set II - A Plywood Factory*, would be of interest to members of the Labour History, P.S.A. Fourteen photos outline the processing of plywood at the Canadian Forest Products Plywood and Hardboard Division Plant in New Westminster, where one-third of the workers are women. Women are featured in the pictures driving fork lifts, operating heavy machinery, wearing hard hats, acting as Plant Chairperson for the I.W.A. The teacher's notes include an Historical Outline of Women's Involvement in Unions, based on information obtained from Marge Storm's paper on Labour History to the Pacific Northwest Labour History Institute Conference, 1975.

Watch for an announcement from *Lesson Aids* about these new items, or contact Wes Knapp, Pearl Roberts or Elaine Darnell of the B.C.T.F. Professional Development staff for further information.

whites not to desert the Indians as they had done in a strike that took place in 1893.

A monster meeting such as had never been seen in the history of Steveston took place on the first night of the strike. Frank Rogers outstanding statement at that meeting was that "force will not be used unless it is necessary, but no fish will be sold below the price set by the union." A parade then took place to every cannery on the river, halting before each Japanese boarding house and bringing out the few who still remained outside of the union. Speeches were made at each place and interpreted by Japanese union men.

Patrols were set up with six men in a boat, the strike flag flying on each boat, a white flag with "25" on it in red figures. From Mission to the Gulf they maintained their patrol, examining every boat out. Few scabs were picked up, not more than two or three in the first three weeks and they were handled so that the fishing industry did not interest them for the rest of the season.

Eight thousand men and their families had to eat. The Japanese were given permission to catch fish that was sold in the

city to provide them with rice. All the trade unions of the Lower Mainland, the miners of the Island and the Boundary Country, the storekeepers of Vancouver, New Westminster and Nanaimo, dug down to feed the strikers at the dining rooms set up by the union.

The first great labour demonstration since the Knights of Labor days was held in Vancouver. Over a thousand striking fishermen who lived in the City, supported by their fellow workers of the other trade unions, marched through the main streets, headed by the Indians' band, went to Nanaimo and staged parades and demonstrations there.

Meantime, the cannerymen were not idle. They used every manoeuvre to defeat the fishermen. To behead the strike Frank Rogers was arrested, held long enough to inconvenience the plans of the strikers and then the charge was withdrawn. A tugboat, the Starling, was hired by the strikers. It was used to tow the canoes with the Indian band to the Island on one trip. She was seized there for carrying passengers without a license, although she carried no passengers, and fined \$100. The fine was paid by the Nanaimo miners.

/cont'd page 24

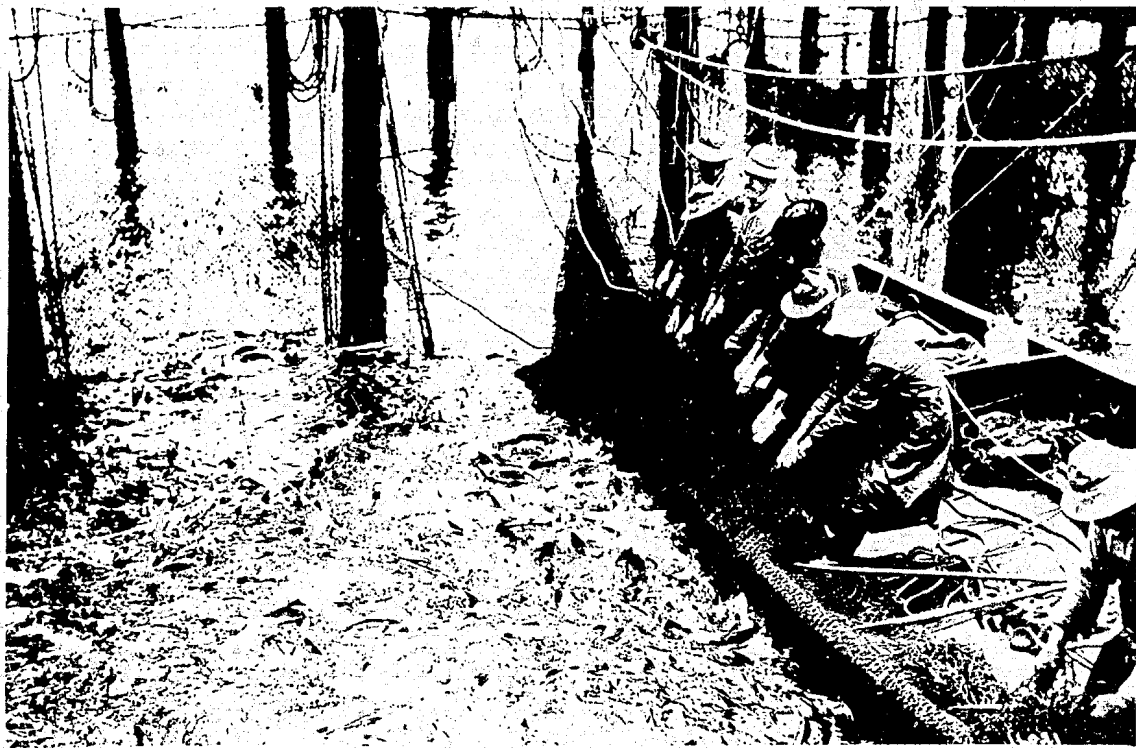


Photo courtesy of Vancouver Public Library



## The Strike of 1936



Photo courtesy of Vancouver Public Library

### in RIVERS INLET

*A turning point in union organization of the B.C. fishing industry, the struggle waged by the Fishermen and Cannery Workers Industrial Union for a 50-cent sockeye price in the central area came to a head in Rivers Inlet in 1936. James M. (Jim) Law of Port Alberni, still fishing at age 73 aboard his gillnetter Lucky Century, was named chairman of the Rivers Inlet strike committee. Interviewed by The Fisherman in 1974, he offered these recollections of the strike, which, although not immediately successful, provided an essential lesson in the need for unity of all sections of the industry and good communications outside the inlets during strikes.*

Before the 1936 strike, when we fished we didn't know what we were going to get until the end of the season. We took what the companies wanted to give us.

In 1936 we fished sockeye for one week and got no satisfaction from the operators as to what price we were going to get, so we held a meeting at all the canneries. Close to 86 per cent voted to tie up for 50 cents apiece for sockeye. The year before, I believe we had been getting 35 or 40 cents, and for a 20 pound dog salmon we'd get a nickel.

The vote included Goose Bay, Wadhams,

Good Hope, Kildala, McTavish, RIC (Rivers Inlet Cannery), Beaver and Provincial canneries, plus the camps run by Nelson, Humphries, Queen Charlotte, and a couple of minor outfits.

It was a big deal. We sent men over to Smith Inlet and asked them to join us, which they did. We shut things down completely.

I had been asked to act as chairman of the strike committee and I wanted to know more about what I was fighting with.

I checked with the fisheries inspect-  
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or there to find out what number of boats, on average, had been in Rivers Inlet for the last five or six years, and how many fish they had caught.

He gave me the figures. The price came out at 40 cents. The majority of fishermen couldn't make it on this. At 40 cents there would be a small number who would make something, but it took 625 fish to break even, and the majority only had around 600 over the period of a year.

We tied up. We got donations for food from Jimmy Dawson at Dawson's Landing. He

"When you're ready to tell us what you're willing to pay, send word down and we'll come up and see you. Good day, gentlemen." And we walked out.

They never did come and tell us. They folded up their tent and went away. But we found out from the cannery that they were not going to pay the price. The strike carried on.

It was after this meeting that the operators endeavoured to bring in this



*"...so we held a meeting at all the canneries..."*

cried about it but there was nothing he could do about it. I had it well organized.

After the first week of the strike the operators called a meeting. The strike committee named Jack (Baldy) Martell, Eino Ahola, myself and Jack Gavin, secretary of the Pacific Coast Fishermen's Union.

We met the cannery and if they had got their way, we would have been talking yet. I had been elected spokesman and I wouldn't stand for this. I just told them to shut up. "Let's get on with the settlement," I said.

They brought up the matter of arbitration and I said there was no need of it. "You're here, we're here and the sockeye are here--everybody concerned," I told them. "We settle here now."

"I never saw an instance where fishermen ever gained from arbitration. I can't see any point in us sitting in here and arguing with you people about the price of fish in Paris or Hong Kong or Tokyo, so we'll just go back down to the net lofts and let you fight it out among yourselves.

bunch from outside, farther up the coast, with towboats and police protection, to break the strike. But they weren't able to do it.

I don't remember whether it was two or three weeks after the strike started that a group of boats tried to go fishing, scabbing, up at the head of Rivers Inlet.

Around two or three o'clock in the morning a yell went up at the Provincial Cannery. "Pickets out, they're scabbing at the head."

Well, within minutes something like 130 engines started up, the boats going in every direction.

We managed to get together enough union men to send some to Goose Bay to call out fishermen there to give us a hand. Some of them complained bitterly about having to go to Goose Bay when they wanted to get in on the excitement at the head. We called out the Beaver Cannery, which was just above Provincial, on the way up, and then we went to Wadham's and Good Hope.

It was quite a sight to see. I was on

a fast boat up in the lead and when I looked back, there was a solid sea of lights coming up behind.

When we came across the first boat, there were suggestions that we wrap the scab in his net around the drum. We sent the scab scurrying to tie up at the machineshop there while we went on.

Then the police arrived. For a time there was a bit of excitement, with searchlights crisscrossing the water and nets going down with rocks on the end of them. It took only one good sized rock on the end of a gillnet and she was straight up and down.

Corks in those days became waterlogged and it was a job to get nets up. It was quite funny to see the police trying to drag those nets aboard. They did everything they could to intimidate us, but we carried on to the end of the sockeye season.

Morale was good. We managed to survive. We got a few boatloads of fish from the scabs after we persuaded them to donate it to the strikers. And, after a little hard talking, we got Jimmy Dawson to donate a large amount of grub.

You might not realize it, if you haven't fished Rivers Inlet, but toward the end of the season the gillnetters are like geese migrating. They congregate in groups of eight or ten and drift around and chew the fat about how many fish there are. They have just had a letter from their wives and there are all kinds of fish on the Fraser.

After a few days these little flocks have increased to 10 or 15 or 20--at least this was the way it was in the old days. Pretty soon they're up to larger rafts of boats talking about home.

Suddenly, somebody starts up an old Easthope, the Vivians and Palmers come to life and they're off. Fraser River, here we come!

However, at the height of the strike there were about 3,000 boats tied up there. Just how many seine boats there were, I don't know.

You'll find the names of the last to

hold the fort there on the cushion cover (now hanging in the office of *The Fisherman*). Those were the diehards who stayed to the end. The cover was made by two or three Sointula women. I believe it was auctioned off and whoever won it donated it to the fishermen.

Axel Anderson, Pinky Mills and Tim Hornbrook were all arrested and tried in Vancouver after the strike. In fact, Axel was taken to town in handcuffs.

Most of us who had been active appeared at the trial and we managed to get them off. They were charged with various offences, such as illegal assembly and molesting a couple of scabs who had been trying to take their load of fish to Namu.

The scabs had been forced to tie up in front of the Provincial, and they had agreed to give all their fish to the strikers. But then they protested to the canners and got the law to step in.

I would say we increased our membership and also our consciousness of what the struggle was all about...and still is.

There had been many strikes before Rivers Inlet. Fishermen would strike for a week or 10 days and that was the end of it. They'd allow the canners to talk them out of it.

This time they didn't. This time the strike committee was really determined to make it go, to carry the thing through to the conclusion. They felt it had to stop sometime. We couldn't make a living at 40 cents a sockeye.

The following year we decided to organize on a larger scale. I know I got busy every weekend and I was quite happy to be able to sign up 200 members during the sockeye season as a result of our efforts the previous year. Many others were doing the same thing.

At the start of the 1937 sockeye season we had a meeting at the Provincial Cannery of most of the original members of the strike committee of the year before. We decided that we had to have an increase, if possible by negotiations rather than through

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a strike. If not, we'd have to tie up again.

We fished the first week. Then on the following weekend, we negotiated with J.H. Todd and got a guaranteed increase. I'm not sure whether it was five or ten cents. We then held a meeting among ourselves and decided that Todd's boats couldn't go fishing unless Canadian Fish and B.C. Packers and Bell-Irving boats also received the increase. We heard that John Buchanan, the general manager of B.C. Packers, was at Wadhams, so a delegation went over and talked to him.

At that time he said he couldn't see paying that price. We pointed out to him that he would have all the gillnetters from Beaver and Provincial canneries buying the following week from the other companies boats unless he did pay it. And he paid it.

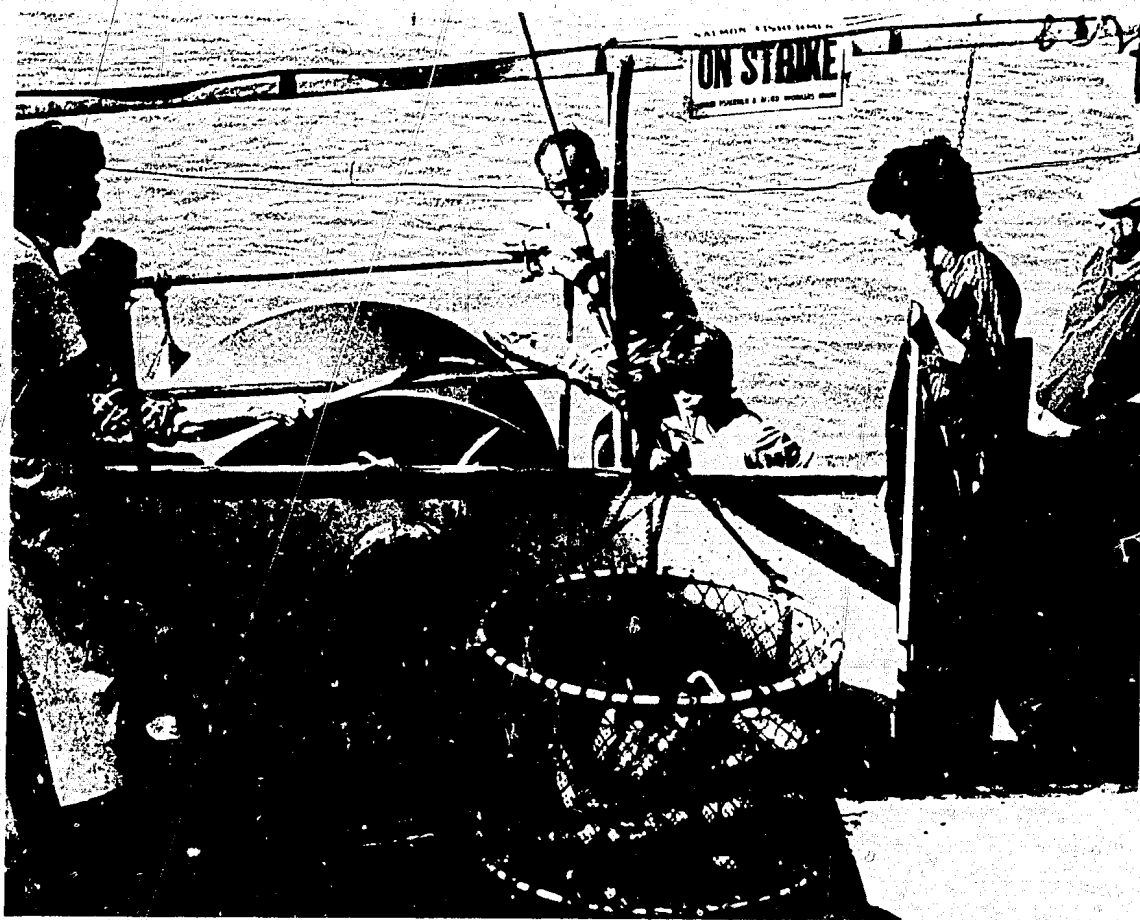
We learnt then that there are times when you have to strike and other times when you can negotiate. We negotiated in the gulf and brought the price of blueback

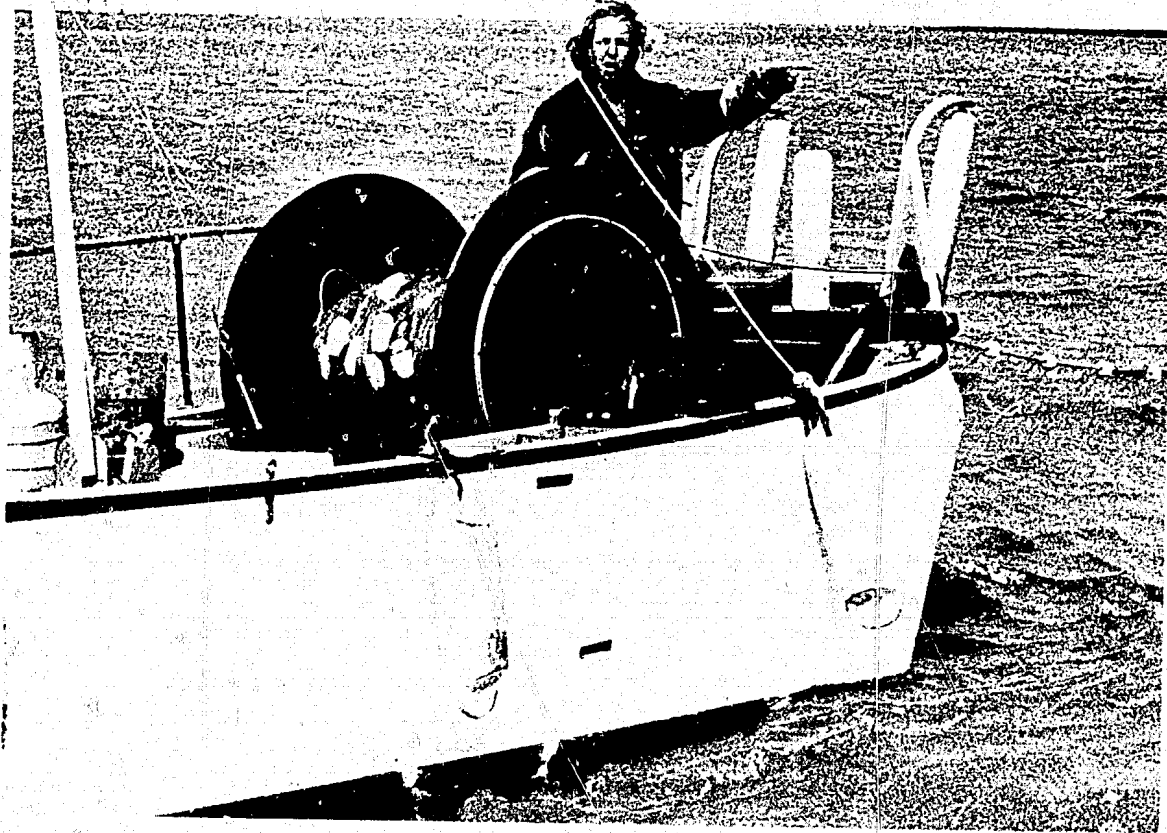
up a few cents every year until in a few years we were getting 36 cents for fish we had been getting 15 cents for. But a lot of us spent a lot of time organizing in 1937 and 1939.

In those days the majority of the Natives and Japanese, and at least half of the white fishermen, owed money to the companies. Sometimes the debts were several thousand dollars for nets and boats, and sons took over the debt from fathers when they died.

Slowly but surely a lot of them have got clear of this, but only because of the higher prices they have won through the union.

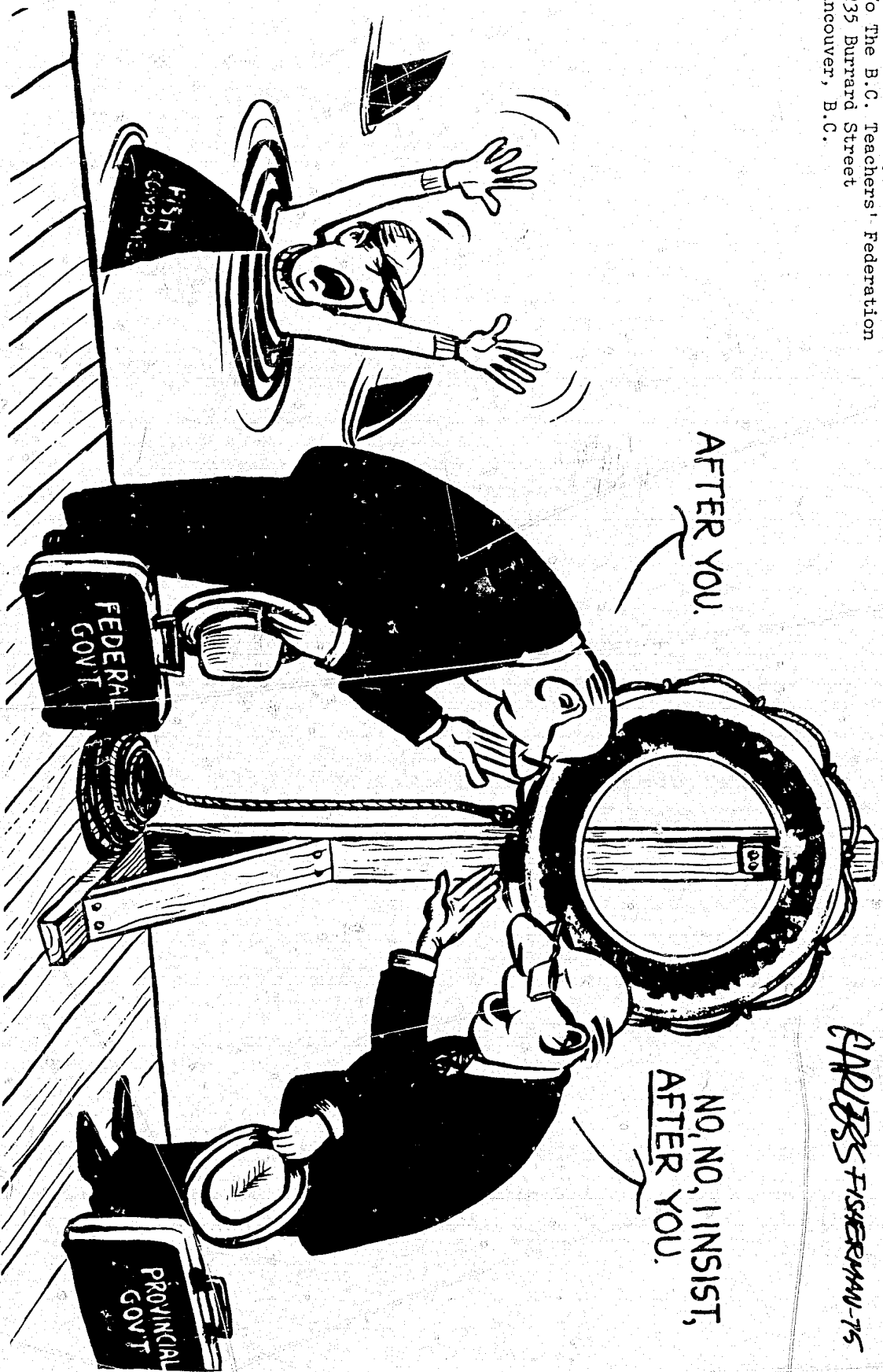
I believe 1936 was really a turning point, because the organization of seiners, trollers and shoreworkers went on from there, growing in strength and influence every year.





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CHARLES FISHER 1975