

NATIVE INDIANS AND THE FISHING INDUSTRY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA*

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INTRODUCTION

CONTEMPORARY industry and society have brought major changes to the economic and social life of the Indians of British Columbia. Most tribal cultures were built upon a simple small-scale base. The tribal band was typically small and closely knit with personal relationships; the individual's status and role were clearly defined, and his activities regulated by tradition. Hunting, fishing, and gathering supplied a livelihood. Equipment and techniques were generally simple and static. Most of the output was for the local community's own use: only a small fraction was bartered for the products of other groups.

The new economic system and the way of life associated with it is almost the direct antithesis of the tribal system outlined above. Today the Indian is involved in a large-scale and increasingly complex system of production and distribution, characterized by dynamic, rapidly changing techniques, a steadily increasing use of automatic power-driven machinery, and a growing production for national or international markets rather than for local use. As worker or producer he has, with few exceptions, lost his direct ownership of, or control over, his means of production. Relationships, defined increasingly by the market rather than by custom, have become more impersonal.

Comparatively few Indians have managed to derive full advantage from the new way of life. Tribal cultures have been disorganized or destroyed, and with them has gone the whole structure of role and status that made life meaningful for individuals. Indians have faced formidable difficulties in acquiring the economic incentives of the white man's culture, and the equipment and techniques with which to meet them. The result has been, in all too many cases, deterioration of morale, apathy, and economic dependency. Indians have become a marginal labour group in many areas: living on reservations, depending upon the government for a large part of their subsistence, and employed only casually in unskilled or menial jobs of a type that other workers avoid.

Here and there one may find occupations in which native Indians have managed to carry over the skills and aptitudes of their tribal culture and acquire new techniques to a degree that enables them to compete successfully with the whites. Where this process has occurred, Indians are in a position to acquire a new sense of identity and of "racial pride." Character-

*Some of the ideas expressed in this article are necessarily repetitious of those to be found in the two articles by Stuart Jamieson and Percy Gladstone, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Feb., 1950, 1-11; May, 1950, 146-71.

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istically, they form new organizations that cut across lines of tribe or tongue, organizations that are designed to strengthen their bargaining power and improve their economic and social status through mutual aid.

One of the most striking examples of this sequence has been, and is, occurring among Indians along the coast of British Columbia whose livelihood is based primarily on the fishing industry. Here, to a degree rarely found in other occupations or regions on the North American continent, native Indians have been able to adapt the special experiences and skills of their traditional cultures to the new requirements of a dynamic, technologically advanced industry.

The fishing industry of British Columbia furnishes at best a lucrative but highly insecure livelihood. Success in the occupation requires a unique combination not only of skill, experience, and fortitude but also of good luck. Demand, supply, and price vary widely from year to year. The supplies of fish are highly seasonal and uncertain. There are variable weather conditions to contend with. A major part of the output ordinarily is exported to foreign markets, where it must compete with the output of other countries. Finally, the industry is characterized by intense competition and rapidly changing techniques which require a steadily larger investment in boats and gear on the part of the fisherman.

Despite these formidable difficulties, native Indians in growing numbers have more than held their own in the fishing industry of British Columbia. Today, perhaps as many as 10,000¹ of them derive their livelihood from fishing and allied occupations, and they have become a vital and necessary part of the labour force in that industry. Their ability to compete on an even basis with the whites is beginning to instil in them a new pride. They are rapidly losing their recent apathy, and becoming an organized and articulate element that may acquire a considerable economic and political bargaining power in this province.

TRIBAL FISHING ECONOMY

The coast of British Columbia is blessed with a great wealth and variety of fish. Prior to the coming of the white man this plentiful food supported a relatively large native Indian population that maintained a rich diversity of culture. In the almost self-sufficient village economies, barter played a secondary role. Fresh, dried, and smoked fish provided staple articles of diet (as well as of barter) supplemented by other products of the sea, such as clams, seaweed (dulse), and herring-eggs. The dense forests crowding the shoreline of most areas along the coast provided meat, furs, hides, berries and herbs, timbers, and fibres for boats and gear.

By far the most important fish to the tribal Indian economy, and also to the present-day economy of British Columbia, were the five species of salmon: spring, sockeye, coho, pink or "humpback," and chum or "dog" salmon. The wealthiest and most populous tribes on the northern Pacific coast were those located in areas adjacent to the main rivers and streams in which salmon came to spawn.

¹Estimate of the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia.

COMMERCIAL RELATIONS WITH THE WHITES

The barter trade in fish carried on with interior groups by numerous coastal tribes facilitated the adjustment of Indians to the development of the fishing industry by the whites during the early nineteenth century. The forts and trading-posts of the Hudson's Bay Company furnished a limited market for fish as well as for furs. From 1835 to 1858 the Company developed an export market in smoked and cured salmon in the Hawaiian Islands and Asia. As compared with total production, however, this was a comparatively small-scale operation confined to an area along the Fraser River where the Hudson's Bay Company claimed a monopoly of fishing rights. The fishing activities of the Indians on behalf of the Company were incidental to production for their own use. The supply of fish was sufficiently plentiful so that production for the market did not interfere with the Indians' claim of inherent and aboriginal rights designed to guard the food supply. Competition with the whites was limited, and no disputes or conflicts were recorded.

LATER COMMERCIAL FISHING

A new problem faced the Indians during the 1860's when the fish-canning industry became established in British Columbia. Practically overnight the Indians had to adjust themselves to drastic economic and cultural changes. In the face of their own changed needs, fishing became a specialized and complex means of economic survival instead of merely one way of obtaining food. Indians had to face growing competition from fishermen who were more experienced in the commercial pursuit: Europeans from various maritime nations, the Americans from the Columbia and Sacramento rivers, and later, the Japanese. They had to cope with rapid technological changes in the industry. They were confronted with a maze of conservation laws and regulations that were difficult to understand, let alone obey. Whereas once they had fished with spears and weirs of their own making, Indians now had to make heavy capital investment for fishing equipment to keep up with their white and Asiatic competitors. Indian women working in the canneries had to deal with similar problems: competition with whites and Asiatics, and the resultant racial animosity and discrimination; constant adaptation to new technological changes; and, in a few cases, displacement by organized workers having closed-shop or seniority agreements with employers.

In their own tribal cultures the Indians were accustomed to a community life directed by heads of family and clan, who were responsible for welfare and for enforcement of the laws. This structure of authority broke down when the economic foundation of the tribal economy was transformed. The hereditary leader was replaced in some of his functions by a new agent, the cannery contractor. Possession of the right to hire and fire Indian fishermen and cannery workers, gave him a measure of control over the economic destinies of his fellow tribesmen.

As a rule, the settlements of the coastal tribes had been located within easy reach of fishing streams or halibut banks. Their limited migratory habits were connected with those of food gathering. In normal years their staple foods had

been easily obtained. With the coming of commercial fishing the Indians found it necessary to make mass migrations to the major fishing and canning centres in the Nass, Skeena, Fraser, and Rivers Inlet areas. In travelling the 1300 miles of navigable waters along the coast of British Columbia, they came into contact with Indians and whites of different languages and customs. They broadened their outlook and improved their techniques at the expense of their own settled tribal and community life.

The relationships of native Indians with the Dominion and provincial governments were also changed by the rapid transformation occurring in the fishing industry. The need for conservation measures brought a steadily increasing degree of government regulation of the industry. Early in the history of commercial fishing restrictions were placed on the Indians' right to obtain fish for food, which they looked upon as a natural right. The General Fishery Regulations of July 18, 1889 restricted their methods of catching salmon, but a Royal Commission appointed two years later recognized the need to continue fishing for food indefinitely. The result was that special provisions guaranteeing their privileges of fishing were included in the Order in Council of 1894. This set a precedent for most subsequent fishing regulations.² By 1918 the Indians of the upper Fraser River, suffering from a decrease of fish due to depletion, actually suggested that the Dominion Government purchase their fishing rights.³ By 1920 the Indians were prohibited from fishing in Hell's Gate and above the Mission Bridge, two formerly important points on the Fraser River.⁴ Today they require a permit for obtaining salmon for food in any river; in the fiscal year 1951-2, 1,848 permits were issued.

The problems of adjustment in commercial fishing have been especially acute among those inland tribes who were primarily trappers, for whom fishing was a secondary and minor occupation. Owing to the loss of their trap-lines through depletion and logging operations, many of them turned to fishing for their main source of income. These Indians, coming from comparatively isolated inland areas, became the marginal fishermen on the coast. Their problems may be gauged by their own oft-repeated statement, "We will soon be the D.P.'s of the fishing industry." They are acutely conscious of their position but are unable to cope with their problems. Because of racial discrimination, lack of training, and inability to break family and community ties, they find it difficult to enter other occupations. It was this group that raised the loudest protest against the return of the Japanese fishermen following World War II.

INDIANS AND TYPES OF FISHING⁵

The Indians have participated in all the specialized branches of fishing. A special method is required for each species of fish: gill-netting for salmon returning to the spawning grounds, purse-seining for fish which "school up."

²A. H. Ainsworth, "Conservation in the British Columbia Salmon Industry," unpublished B.A. thesis, April, 1946, University of British Columbia, p. 18.

³Report of Fisheries Commission for British Columbia, Dec. 31, 1918, 12.

⁴Report of Fisheries Commission for British Columbia, Dec. 31, 1920, 13.

⁵See also Jamieson and Gladstone, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," 5-6.

trolling for off-shore fish, beam-trawling and long-lining for bottom fish. Each method in turn requires a special type of boat and equipment, and it may be competing against another method used in taking the same kind of fish: for example, gill-netting against purse-seining for salmon, the "mosquito" halibut fleet against the larger specialized halibut boats. This competition creates occupational antagonism, which is sometimes transferred to racial antagonisms.

The fishing industry tends to be divided into specializations according to ethnic groups. Thus the Yugoslav and Austrian fishermen have a tendency to specialize in purse-seining, the Norwegians in halibut fishing, the Japanese in gill-netting and trolling. The Chinese and Indians have been the main workers in the processing plants, though in recent times Indians are being displaced by machinery as well as by an increasing number of white workers.

In the case of the Indians there also exists what might be termed geographic specialization. The great majority are permanently settled on reservations scattered along the coast of British Columbia. Generally they have gone to the nearest cannery during the fishing season and engaged in the type of fishing suited to the local species. In modern times, faced with depletion of the salmon, but aided by high-powered boats with radio-telephone, the British Columbia fishing fleet has become highly mobile. The Indian fishermen, in common with others, cover increasingly large areas in search of fish. Yet basically the type of fishing followed by the Indians is still related to factors of their local environment. Accordingly, around the great salmon areas of the Nass, Skeena, Fraser, and Rivers Inlet, gill-netting and purse-seining predominate. Along the west coast of Vancouver Island and around the Queen Charlotte Islands, trolling and purse-seining are the main methods.

Gill-netting was the original method of commercial salmon fishing and remains the method most used by the Indians. Some eleven hundred⁶ gill-

⁶The statistics on licences issued were furnished by the Federal Department of Fisheries, 1110 West Georgia Street, Vancouver, B.C. The number of licences issued is no indication of the ratio of fish caught. It would be interesting to find out what proportion of the total catch of fish was caught by Indian fishermen but at the present time investigation of this question is not possible.

FISHERY LICENCES, FISCAL YEAR 1951-2

<i>Variety of Licence</i>	<i>Indians</i>	<i>Total</i>
Salmon trap-net		5
Salmon drag-seine	9	9
Salmon purse-seine	52	501
Salmon gill-net	1122	5429
Salmon trolling	596	5129
Asst. salmon gill-net	42	206
Capt. salmon purse-seine	164	387
Asst. salmon purse-seine	758	2412
Cod	145	684
Crayfish	7	258
Crab	46	181
Small dragger	8	94
Smelt		42
Miscellaneous	8	218
Herring purse-seine	2	74
Capt. herring purse-seine	6	47

netting licences were issued to them in 1950 compared to 922 for salmon purse-seining and 596 for salmon-trolling.

Salmon-trolling furnishes a good example of geographic restriction. This type of fishing is a later development than gill-netting and purse-seining. Originally gill-net boats were easily adapted for trolling and the latter actually was an off-season occupation for gill-netters. Nowadays many localities specialize in trolling and do not take part in gill-netting. Salmon-trolling in the areas mentioned earlier had the added advantage that the Indians were able to operate from their native villages.

In the case of halibut fishing a difficulty has arisen from overfishing and serious depletion. The history of this type of fishing differs from that of the other branches. Originally it was carried on by two-men dories operating from a steam trawler which served as the mother ship, a method patterned on cod fishing in Newfoundland and eastern Canada. Depletion soon became a serious problem. New halibut banks had to be found and each succeeding year the halibut boats were forced to go farther from the home ports. What was once a yearly operation of indiscriminate fishing was altered by international regulation to seasonal operations limited by a quota system. Depleted and scattered halibut banks called either for privately owned smaller boats or for schooners ranging up to 80 feet in length. The capital required for these specialized boats and gear was beyond the reach of most Indians, with the result that they remained of minor importance in the halibut fishing.

There is a current trend for the Indians to obtain larger seine boats. It is becoming necessary to operate larger fishing boats in a number of types of fishing: for seining, beam-trawling, and halibut fishing. For this reason the number of Indian halibut fishermen has increased each year. Then again, a large number of Indians in the small gill-netter and trolling boats form a substantial part of the modern halibut "mosquito fleet." This is a major occupation for them before the opening of the gill-netting season. In 1950, 263 halibut fishing licences⁷ were issued to Indians. Beam-trawling is another

<i>Variety of Licence</i>	<i>Indians</i>	<i>Total</i>
Asst. herring purse-seine	41	387
Pilchard purse-seine		
Capt. pilchard purse-seine		
Asst. pilchard purse-seine		
Herring gill-net		28
Herring pound	2	17
Herring trawl		12
Capt. herring trawl		
Asst. herring trawl		7
Capt. halibut or black cod	263	928
Capt. halibut for bait		6
Capt. tuna	1	96
Asst. tuna		33
Abalone	20	24
Whaling		5
Angling permits		414
	3292	17,633

Indian permits (for domestic food) 1848.

⁷Only the captain of the boat and not the fishermen require a licence.

development which is the result of owning larger boats. Indian participation in this type of fishing is centred at Massett in the Queen Charlotte Islands, where there are twelve large boats capable of this operation.

Large-scale herring seining is a development arising out of World War II. Part of the impetus has been the total disappearance of pilchards from the coast of British Columbia since 1942. Herring fishing requires larger, modern boats, fully equipped with the latest sonic developments. The necessary capital investment is tremendous, ranging to \$125,000, and, until recently, all equipment was owned by the companies. Several Indians were engaged in fishing pilchards but have not begun to fish extensively for herring. Indian fishermen from Bella Bella and Alert Bay are the sole representatives in this phase of the industry. The Indian feels that he is being discriminated against in company employment in this type of fishing, and at present is attempting to enlarge his small share in the catch.

PARTICIPATION IN FISHING LABOUR DISPUTES⁸

The commercial fishing industry has been characterized by annual labour disputes, some of them violent. The militancy of the fishermen has culminated in their being led by the militant United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. The role of the Indians themselves has changed from extreme militancy at the turn of the century to a conservative unionism at the present day. They now participate in fishing disputes but as a group refuse to become incorporated into white fishing unions or associations, preferring to maintain their identity through their own bargaining unit, the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia.

In commercial fishing each fisherman with his equipment is an independent unit competing with others. Every year increasing numbers of modern and independent units vie for the supply of fish available during the limited seasons. The income of the fisherman is made uncertain by the variability of fish "runs," and earnings may be further decreased by severe conservation measures which further shorten the season if the run of fish fails to materialize. As the capital expenditure for boats and equipment increases, a larger gross income is required for upkeep; and it becomes imperative for each individual fisherman to enlarge the scope of his operations. Whereas in former times the boats and equipment had been largely owned by the fishing companies, the modern trend is toward individual ownership of boats. This shifts the risks of ownership to the individual fishermen, but at the same time alters the employer-employee relationship which formerly existed between the cannery operators and fishermen. The industry is affected by world economic conditions and the fisherman is faced with price fluctuations as the demand for and the supply of fish products fluctuate. In addition to contending with these economic factors he is constantly struggling with the elements. He must be a mechanic as well as a mariner with a high degree of familiarity with local geography.

⁸Indians participated in all disputes listed and described in Gladstone and Jamieson, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," 146-71. The present article is confined to reports of actual participation of Indians in the strikes.

At first glance it might appear that the antagonism resulting from the competition and hazards of the industry would result in the formation of heterogeneous competing groups. Yet these very difficulties and problems help create a strong group sentiment and a feeling of the need for mutual aid, a condition necessary for the formation of strong labour unions. This group sentiment has been strong enough to transcend occupational antagonism, language and racial differences, as well as geographic isolation. Many Indian fishermen feel a kinship with their fellow white fishermen to a degree only slightly less than with other Indian fishermen. The result is that the Indians actively co-operate with white fishing unions, though they join them only as a last resort. Prior to the mid-1930's, all labour unionism in British Columbia fishing was composed of a series of local units in isolated areas often working at cross purposes. Since isolation has been overcome by increased communication, the local units have been merged into one coastwise union. The Indians, however, still live in comparatively isolated reservations along the coast. They move to the canneries during the fishing season and then return home, thus losing contact with labour problems.

The fact that the Indian fishermen are in sympathy with labour unions and take an active part in fishing disputes, yet remain outside the white fishing unions, is a result of a combination of causes. Aside from isolation, a distrust of white unions has resulted from discrimination and from their abandonment of the Indians in several early fishing strikes. Moreover, the Indians of British Columbia are in a transitional stage in their social and economic conditions. There is a strong link with the past, yet there is an inevitable drift towards participation as full citizens. The opposing pressures are shown in the strong desire of the Indians to maintain their identity in an inclusive Indian organization. Thus the Native Brotherhood is a separate bargaining agency which works in close co-operation with the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. Their desire to remain as an Indian group may be due in part to racial discrimination on the part of U.F.A.W.U. members, in part to unfamiliarity with the factors underlying labour bargaining. In part also, the cause is the fear of being absorbed by the militant U.F.A.W.U., where they would be a minority group; the Native Brotherhood is and will remain an exclusively Indian group. Finally, each Indian desires the responsibility of conducting his own affairs.

The Indian fishermen are subject to the same fishing laws and regulations as the white, yet legally the Indians are minors, wards of the federal government, and the local Indian Agent is responsible for the general welfare of the Indians in his district. It would be expected that, with the power vested in the local Indian Agent, he would advise the Indians in their labour problems. Attempts by an Indian Agent were made early in the history of the fishing industry to dissuade Indians from joining unions. However, in 1900 the Honourable Mr. Sifton, then Minister of the Interior, overruled the Agent, stating that the "Indians could do as they wished in this matter."⁹ With only one exception this has remained the policy of the Indian Department.

⁹*Vancouver Daily Province*, July 16, 1900, 3.

The Indians have played an active role in fishing disputes from the beginning of the fishing industry. Then militancy arose from antagonism to the influx of Japanese fishermen. Furthermore, the Indians were at that time faced with the loss of their "aboriginal and inherent rights" in fishing. Even today bitter antagonism is directed against the Japanese fishermen, and there still arises a feeling of resentment against the white fishermen who "invade" local fishing areas.

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF LABOUR DISPUTES MAINLY INVOLVING INDIANS¹⁰

In 1893 the Indians, as members of the Fraser River Fishermen's Benevolent Association, staged a strike for an increase of daily wage from \$2.50 to \$3. At that time the fishermen were paid a daily wage regardless of their actual catch. To offset attempts made by the Cannery Association to use other Indians and Japanese as strike breakers, the Union resorted to intimidation of the Indians "and to this end is practicing questionable methods."¹¹ The cannery's reply was an offer of \$50. reward for the arrest and conviction of any person found "interfering with or intimidating fishermen or other employees, inciting any person or persons to do anything unlawful."¹² During this period appeals were made to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs to induce the Indians to return to fishing, but to no avail. Apparently the Indians were determined to continue their stand since at a subsequent meeting three Indian Chiefs, Capilano George, Cranberry Jack, and Charles Meshell, spoke and the "tale they told showed clearly they fully understood the grievance of the white fishermen and being in sympathy therewith, had joined the union. They narrated how they had been intimidated by the Indian Agent and expressed their contempt for him and their determination to have nothing further to do with him. They thought he should look after their interests and not the interests of the cannery. They spoke of the poor wages, of their having to travel around the four cities in order to make a living."¹³ The white fishermen subsequently broke the strike, and the Indians were abandoned; but they did win the praise of the Union leaders who stated that no Indians had "volunteered to assist the cannery until some white men had led the way."¹⁴

Following 1893, the fishing industry was adversely affected by the world economic depression. Labour activity in lower British Columbia was quiet. In the northern area around the Skeena River several strikes are recorded¹⁵ but no details are available. Strikes were staged in 1894, 1896, and 1897. The first two were disputes over the price of fish, the last appears to have been over cannery wages. These seem to have been local disputes directed against individual operators and were of short duration.

¹⁰See fuller list of disputes in Jamieson and Gladstone, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," 148-52.

¹¹*Vancouver Daily Province*, July 14, 1893, 4. This and subsequent quotations are given not so much for their factual accuracy as for the indication they give of the attitudes and expressions of the parties involved in the disputes.

¹²*Vancouver Daily Province*, July 15, 1893, 2.

¹³*Vancouver Daily World*, July 24, 1893, 2.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵From the diary of R. Cunningham, pioneer cannery operator of Port Essington, B.C., which was the centre of early Skeena River fishing.

During the 1890's a more serious problem for the Indians arose out of the influx of Japanese fishermen. Gold discoveries in the Slocan area and the Yukon caused an exodus of white fishermen. To meet the labour shortages in the industry, Japanese were brought in. By 1896, approximately one-quarter of the 6000 British Columbia fishermen were Japanese. By 1898, the Japanese competition had become a serious issue with the Indians. In 1899, when they felt that they had a bargaining advantage on the Fraser owing to the shortage of white labour, the Indians went on strike for increased fish prices. The attempt was unsuccessful because it failed to win the support of the Japanese.

During the violent Fraser River strikes of 1900 and 1901 the Indian showed a militant attitude not since apparent. In the 1900 strike the Indians, with the Fraser River Fishermen's Union, made a determined stand against the Japanese fishermen, the Cannery Operators' Association, the militia, the Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles, and the Superintendent of the Indian Department. It was during this period that the Honourable Mr. Sifton issued the statement previously mentioned. The strike ended when the Japanese, who had previously guaranteed to co-operate with white and Indian fishermen, went fishing under the protection of the militia. The Indians who had long regarded fishing as their heritage were then to watch while the "Canadian authorities had to provide sufficient force to prevent an alien force of fishermen defend, by recourse to arms, their inalienable right to work."¹⁶ The bitterness of the Indians increased when the canners showed no concern over the return of the Indian fishermen.

During the Fraser River strike of 1900, the village of Port Simpson, near the mouth of the Skeena River, took a particularly active part. In the village was a local of the British Columbia Fishermen's Union, organized in 1899. The Port Simpson brass band led the parade of mass demonstrators during the strike, provided music for meetings, and later travelled to Nanaimo to give concerts for the purpose of gaining support and raising funds.

Plans were made early by white fishermen for the 1901 fishing season, based on the experience gained from the 1900 strike. A Grand Lodge of British Columbia Fishermen was organized to co-ordinate locals and to strengthen them. The white fishermen conferred with the Indians "to ascertain the general feeling among the Indians concerning the moral right of the Japanese to fish on the Fraser River."¹⁷ As a result of the conferences the demands for the 1901 season were signed by 33 prominent Indians from Port Simpson to the Fraser River and inland to Harrison Hot Springs. The Indians were unanimous in their demands and were supported by sixty per cent of the white fishermen. The cannery operators were beginning to use Japanese women for cannery labour, and could dispense with some Indians, stating "the Indians were not of special value to the canneries."¹⁸ For their part, the Indians expressed no great desire to return to the canneries as there had been "too much trouble these last few years" to please them.¹⁹

The 1901 strike ended favourably to the cannery operators, again on account

¹⁶*Vancouver Daily Province*, July 24, 1900, 1.

¹⁷*Vancouver Daily Province*, May 31, 1901, 9.

¹⁸*Vancouver Daily Province*, June 22, 1901, 1.

¹⁹*Vancouver Daily Province*, June 20, 1901, 1.

of the organized strike-breaking of the Japanese fishermen, who had been brought into British Columbia in greater numbers. By 1901 the Japanese held 1,958 out of 4,722 licences issued in British Columbia. No doubt they also received most of the 1,090 issued to the canneries, since by estimates of the Department of Fisheries²⁰ there were over 4,000 Japanese fishermen in the industry. The attitude of the Indians may be gauged by the uncompromising statement of one of them that "any man who would take less than 12½¢ (for a single sockeye) ought to drown the first time he went out in a boat."²¹

The next dispute occurred in the region of the Skeena and Nass Rivers. In 1904 the Indians struck for higher fish prices. During this period Indian and Japanese fishermen were equal in number. The latter offered passive support by refraining from fishing, but anxiously awaited the results of the dispute. No agreement was reached and the net result was that over 300 Indians left the northern area to fish in the Fraser River. The leader of this strike was Nedildahld of Port Essington, who was a "first class agitator, being possessed of a good command of language and the faculty of impressing the most optimistic feeling among his followers. In consequence of the influence of Nedildahld, the Indians are unanimous in their refusal to fish."²²

In 1907 Indian women demanded higher pay in the canneries. Labour during this period was scarce and the Indian women had the advantage of a decrease in the number of Japanese women working in the canneries. Through their strengthened bargaining power the Indians "demanded and received a higher wage."²³

The ensuing years were comparatively inactive. The Indians were losing their confident militancy owing to past failures in disputes and to repeated abandonment by white and Japanese fishermen. In 1912 the Indian drag-seine fishermen of Nimpkish village on Vancouver Island demanded a high price for sockeye. However, the white fishermen accepted the lower offer of the cannery and resumed fishing, leaving the Indians with no alternative but to return to their fishing operations. By 1913 the Indians were definitely a minority group in the industry, holding 430 fishing licences against 1,088 held by Japanese and 832 held by whites.²⁴ The Indians and whites were unorganized despite the efforts of the Vancouver branch of the Industrial Workers of the World. On the other hand, the more numerous Japanese fishermen had become an organized group. They led a strike in 1913 while the Indians and white fishermen were ready to accept the operator's offer. The Indian and white fishermen were subjected to violence, intimidation, and property damage by the Japanese strikers.²⁵

In 1914 Indians became members of the Fraser River Fishermen's Protective Association organized by the New Westminster Board of Trade on an anti-Japanese platform. Subsequently, during World War I, the Indians took practically no part in labour disputes or activities. Fish prices had increased, the war had created labour shortages, and the Indians were enjoying a fair

²⁰Report (Ottawa, 1902), 390.

²¹Vancouver Daily Province, June 22, 1901, 1.

²²Vancouver Daily Province, July 13, 1904, 1.

²³Vancouver World, July 19, 1907, 73.

²⁴Vancouver Daily Province, July 27, 1907, 7.

²⁵Ibid.

degree of prosperity. Another cause of this quiet period was the deep sense of patriotism of the Indians generally.

In their participation in the fishing industry, the Indians had come in contact with missionaries, teachers, and businessmen. These contacts all operated to change the cultures. Moreover, the Indians held a place in a highly competitive industry with little chance of turning to other occupations. They no longer possessed the unity and cohesion they had gained at the beginning of the commercial fishing period. Their determination had weakened since the turn of the century. They took a less active role in unions but they were still active in disputes. During World War I the Japanese had further consolidated their position in the industry, and by 1919 held 3,267 licences, or approximately half the total issued that year.²⁶ They had replaced the Indians in practically every branch of the fishing industry. The Indians' position in the industry was further jeopardized by the post-war depression and the influx of ex-servicemen into the industry.

Their weakened position was evidenced by their own disunity in Rivers Inlet during a dispute in 1922. A majority of the Indians had voted for strike action, but the minority group under the protection of the British Columbia police "amid cheers and armed to meet trouble"²⁷ broke the strike.

In the economic depression of the 1930's the organizing of the fishermen proceeded under the direction of the Workers' Unity League, and from this activity emerged the Fish Cannery Workers Industrial Union, with the purpose of organizing all the fishermen and shore workers in the industry. The only Indian local was at North Vancouver and sent eight representatives to the 1933 convention of the F.C.W.I.U. Their main demand was the abolition of the contract system of hiring Indian fishermen and cannery workers. The F.C.W.I.U. disbanded in 1935 and reorganized into separate locals to cover different branches of the industry.

During this period the Indians were forming their own organization. In 1934 the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia was formed primarily as a fraternal group, with the aim of furthering the general welfare of the British Columbia Indians and of bringing before the proper authorities the plight of the Indians in regard to medical care, educational facilities, and social welfare. Though the Brotherhood was not yet a recognized bargaining agent, it did represent the Indian fishermen on the Fishermen's Joint Committee, which was composed of five fishermen's unions. The primary purpose of the Committee was the co-ordination of negotiations of organized fishermen with cannery operators.

The last of the long and costly strikes occurred in the Rivers Inlet area in 1936, when the entire fishing season was lost. During the last week of the strike a few Indians were left to see that there was no organized strike-breaking. However, Native Brotherhood members as well as white fishermen came from the Northern area and broke the strike. With no earnings for the season many of the Indian cannery workers were returned to their homes by chartered steamer.

²⁶C. H. Young and H. R. Y. Reid, *The Japanese Canadians* (Toronto, 1938), 43.

²⁷*Vancouver Daily Province*, July 15, 1922, 7.

One direct outcome of the 1936 strike was the beginning of gill-netting in Johnstone Straits.²⁸ The Indians were faced with the need to obtain relief after the fishing season was lost on account of strike action. They sought aid from the local Branch of Indian Affairs, posing a moral issue to the Government. As a partial solution, the local Indian Agent, with the co-operation of the cannery operators, persuaded the Indians to gill-net in Johnstone Straits. This operation is an important one today.

A second by-product of the 1936 strike was the first all-Indian union. During this strike the Indians felt that they had been misled and abandoned by the white fishermen, especially when they were left to guard the strike-bound area while the white fishermen went elsewhere to fish. As a result, the Indians of the Kwakiutl Agency, embracing fishing villages from Alert Bay to Cape Mudge, organized the Pacific Coast Native Fishermen's Association. The aims of this organization were:

(1) to further the spirit of co-operation between the Indian fishermen and the fishing industry generally for the mutual benefit of all; (2) to have definite arrangements made and agreed upon between the Indians and the industry before proceeding to the fishing grounds, to avoid difficulties thereafter; (3) to protect the interests of all Indians engaged in the fishing industry; (4) to increase the number of Indian fishermen to a fair proportion of those engaged in the industry; and (5) to safeguard against the use of unfair means of determining fishing boundaries by local interests to the detriment of the industry as a whole.²⁹ Many Indian members of the P.C.N.F.A. claim that a separate organization was proposed in order to maintain their identity since many Indians had lost faith in white leaders. The P.C.N.F.A. officials did contact the white unions asking them to release all Indian members but their request was refused.

In 1942, by Order in Council, the Indians were made liable for income tax payments. The Indian fishermen were opposed to this order and turned to the Native Brotherhood to voice their protests. It was by reason of their opposition to the income tax payments that the rather localized P.C.N.F.A. joined the larger province-wide Native Brotherhood. The P.C.N.F.A. faction, still largely composed of the Kwakiutl members of the Native Brotherhood who were more aggressive and more experienced in fishing matters, soon became the dominant group in the Brotherhood. More and more of the Brotherhood's activities were directed towards fishing problems, and by 1945 the Brotherhood was officially recognized by the British Columbia Department of Labour as the bargaining agent for all British Columbia Indian fishermen.

Though the Native Brotherhood is recognized as a union for bargaining its primary purpose is still the betterment of the general welfare, the health and the education of the British Columbia Indians, and it also deals with legislative problems affecting the Indians. Its strength as a bargaining agent is due to its close co-operation with the U.F.A.W.U., which has jurisdiction over the majority of fishermen and shore workers. The two organizations attempt to settle prices, working conditions, wages, and other matters of mutual interest

²⁸Concerning the pioneering phase of this development there is some dispute. Another version is that the Finns of Sointula accidentally discovered the possibility of gill-netting in the Straits.

²⁹Indian Agency, Alert Bay, B.C.

with the Fishery Council of British Columbia before the fishing season opens, and thus prevent disputes during the actual fishing season. At the end of negotiations separate agreements are signed, the Native Brotherhood signing on behalf of all Indian fishermen and shore workers. The two organizations have an oral understanding that the U.F.A.W.U. will not use undue pressure to enroll Indian members. However, many Indian fishermen and shore workers, especially in the northern region of British Columbia, are voluntarily joining the U.F.A.W.U.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

During the 1930's there was a phenomenal growth of fishermen's co-operatives. These were undertaken by trollers and halibut fishermen who, as a rule, are independent operators. The co-operatives might be considered to be the counterpart of the unions of the same period, among the fishermen who could not be considered in the employee-employer class. The Indians recognized the growth of co-operatives but did not join. The main problem has been the financing of the season's operations. Loans for this purpose obtained from a fishing company carry an obligation to fish for the company. Another problem was posed by the legal position of the Indians. Financial advances could not be recovered by recourse to law and the early co-operatives could not afford to take financial risks. Furthermore, racial prejudice shown by the co-operatives' members touched the Indians directly, particularly in the north. An underlying reason for this prejudice was the fear that the Indians would vote *en masse* for candidates of their own people for the directorship of the co-operatives.

However, the trollers of the west coast of Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands did form organizations modelled on the co-operatives. The Indians were forced by economic conditions of the 1930's to make a concerted effort to obtain financial aid as groups rather than as individuals. These organizations operated on the principle that the fishermen formed an Association to which the company advanced credit in return for the total catch. The Association then advanced credit to individual fishermen. Because of the increased production for the companies they were able to pay a commission on a poundage basis to the Association, aside from the regular fish prices. This commission constituted the income of the Association. However, the collection of the advances made to individual fishermen was difficult, with the result that the practice has been abandoned except at Nootka, Vancouver Island, where the operation has been successful under the guidance of the Roman Catholic Church.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

The coast Indians have been identified with the fishing industry from the earliest days, and their adjustment to this industry indicates that they will continue to be a part of it. For many of them it is still difficult to enter other occupations. The industry offers opportunities both in the primary fishing and in the secondary stages of processing, and both are becoming year-round operations. The racial prejudices and language difficulties, which formerly restricted these opportunities, are gradually being overcome. Fishing offers

freedom and independence, and self-employed, independent proprietorship. Enjoying these, the Indians acquire a sense of responsibility, and their feeling of security increases.

The trend among the Indians is towards private ownership of boats and gear. This was especially noticeable during World War II when fish prices were comparatively high and the Japanese were removed from the Coast. Many of the Japanese boats were made available for the Indian fishermen; thus there was no decrease in the total fishing gear used. The antagonistic feeling against the Japanese remained and the Indians shared in the pride that the over-all production of fish could be maintained without the Japanese fishermen.

In Massett, Queen Charlotte Islands, one finds one of the largest and finest seine-boat fleets of any community on the coast, valued at \$350,000. The same village boasts a modern boat-building yard, where each year a large seine boat is launched. Farther down large fleets are owned at Bella Bella and Alert Bay (examples picked almost at random). It has been estimated that the Indians in British Columbia own large boats valued at one and one-half million dollars, and to protect their interests the owners have formed a Fishing Vessel Owners' Association to work in close co-operation with the Native Brotherhood.

The old concept of "aboriginal and inherent rights" in fishing is gradually being replaced by the realization that to survive in the industry the fisherman must make an all-out effort to maximize his season's catch. The industry is faced with problems identical with those of the fishermen. The companies must invest increasingly large amounts to prepare for an uncertain supply of fish, with no guarantee of returns. During the season they must make an effort to maintain full production—and the non-producing or even the marginal-producing fisherman is out of place. The Indian fisherman is coming to realize that the interests of the fishermen and canners are interdependent and that both are vulnerable to the uncertainties of the industry, including the possibility of loss through disputes. The trend in the industry to maximize returns from the use of capital and labour is resulting in company mergers, centralized operation in large units, and technical improvements.

A serious problem is posed by the loss of foreign markets. At present the domestic market is being exploited but greater sales would require still lower fish prices to the consumers. The fishermen are faced with increased operating costs along with possibly decreased incomes through lower prices. The resulting feeling of insecurity is causing many of the Indian fishermen to turn to the U.F.A.W.U. hoping to maintain prices. On the other hand, in the event of a dispute leading to a tie-up, the Indian is more vulnerable than some of the other fishermen. He is faced with the loss of a year's income, and has fewer possibilities of alternative employment.

The present indications are that the Indian fishermen have a feeling of group responsibility and they believe that through their Brotherhood they are capable of conducting their own affairs. This is especially true of the older Indian fishermen. If the Native Brotherhood takes effective action in maintaining this feeling of group responsibility the Indian fishermen may well be the main stabilizing factor in an uncertain industry.