

THE CREATION AND ORGANISATION OF CHEAP WAGE LABOUR IN
THE BRITISH COLUMBIA FISHING INDUSTRY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the manner in which labour has been employed in the British Columbia fishing industry, and with the more general historical development of a labour force which provides labour power at wages below full subsistence costs. The phrase "cheap labour" refers to this labour force.

The thesis briefly traces the emergence of capitalism in feudal England and argues that labour power was priced in two ways. Organised male craft workers fought for the "family wage"; that is, for wages that would cover not only their own costs of production and reproduction, but also those of their dependents. This meant, however, that when women and children worked for wages, these were not designed to cover their subsistence requirements. They were employed as "cheap labour." With European colonisation, gender criteria were extended to incorporate racial criteria. It is argued that cheap labourers came to be distinguished by race and ethnicity, in addition to gender and age.

The differentiation of labour based on biological criteria was adopted elsewhere, and the main body of the thesis is concerned with how this process occurred within British Columbia's fishing industry. The B.C. industry began with cannery who had to recruit a new labour force in regions without large supplies of European workers. The thesis

traces how canners employed native peoples and Chinese male labourers. The argument is advanced that these groups were paid wages below the costs of subsistence, and that the groups survived because they were embedded in pre-capitalist social relations. They subsisted through a combination of wage labour and unpaid work.

The thesis examines Marx's labour theory of value for its utility in explaining the development of a "cheap labour force." Although the theory must be re-worked to incorporate two forms of labour power, it provides a more appropriate model than that of the dual labour market theories. The method of historical materialism, which Marx employed, can be used to re-work the labour theory of value. In particular, the method allows for an analysis of resistance by labourers (for example, through trade union organization, such as the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union). These theoretical applications are discussed in the thesis.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In understanding the historical formation and organised resistance of salmon cannery crews in the British Columbia (B.C.) fishing industry, it is necessary to understand that there are two ways of pricing labour power. Labour power can be priced in the labour market above costs necessary to meet the individual's survival, or it can be priced at costs which either meet bare subsistence requirements, or fall below them. Understanding how these differential wages have arisen, and how they have been inextricably connected to biological criteria (specifically, gender, age and race/ethnicity) requires an understanding of how capitalism first developed in feudal England and how it subsequently spread to other parts of the world.

Wages are not necessarily the only means labourers use to meet subsistence needs. Depending on the particular economy, various relations of production that characterised the economy prior to the development of capitalism continue, although in a modified manner that reflects the dominant capitalist mode of production.¹ And these pre-capitalist relations allow subsistence requirements to be met through a combination of monetary and non-monetary means. Thus, the exact

quantity of wages necessary to ensure subsistence fluctuates, partially in accordance with the degree of dependence of the individual labourer on the commodity market, where wages are substituted for goods such as food, shelter and clothing. Another factor determining wages for specific groups is their ability to collectively bargain with employers.

Historically, the group of labourers who, through persistent organised struggle, was able to command wages above costs necessary to ensure individual survival emerged from organised gild crafts production in feudal England. The "regime of gild monopoly" ultimately proved an obstacle to capitalist industry (Dobb, 1978: 229).

[N]ot until the last quarter of the [nineteenth] century did the working class begin to assume the homogeneous character of a factory proletariat...the horizon of interest was apt to be the trade and even the locality, rather than the class; and the survival of the individualist traditions of the artisan and the craftsman, with the ambition to become himself a small employer, was for long an obstacle to any firm and widespread growth of trade unionism, let alone of class consciousness (Dobb, 1978: 265-266).

In the same paragraph, Dobb notes that the "survival of traditions of work from an earlier epoch" meant that a "premium was placed on the grosser forms of petty exploitation associated with long hours and sweated labour, children's employment, deductions and truck and the disregard of health and safety." Thompson's analysis of the roots of the British working class corresponds, at least on this subject, to that of Dobb.

But this conflict between the artisans and the large employers was only part of a more general exploitive pattern. The dishonourable part of the trade grew, with the displacement of small masters (employing a few journeymen and apprentices) by large 'manufactories' and middlemen (employing domestic outworkers or sub-contracting): with the collapse of all meaningful apprenticeship safeguards...and the influx of unskilled, women and

children: with the extension of hours and of Sunday work: and with the beating down of wages, piece-rates and wholesale prices (Thompson, 1979: 275).

While neither Dobb nor Thompson differentiates labour along the lines of gender, age or race/ethnicity, such divisions (at least regarding age and gender) can be deduced from their historical accounts, to which Engels' firsthand report can be added. For example, in his preface to the English publication of 1892, in discussing the Factory Acts and the emergence of the "Trades' Unions," he notes:

They are the organisations of those trades in which the labour of grown-up men predominates, or is alone applicable. Here the competition neither of women and children nor of machinery has so far weakened their organised strength...That their condition has remarkably improved since 1848 there can be no doubt...They form an aristocracy among the working-class...

But as to the great mass of working-people, the state of misery and insecurity in which they live now is as low as ever, if not lower...The law which reduces the value of labour-power to the value of the necessary means of subsistence, and the other law which reduces its average price, as a rule, to the minimum of those means of subsistence, these laws act upon them with the irresistible force of an automatic engine which crushes them between its wheels (Engels, 1977: 33-34, emphasis in original).

While such a description did not preclude men from membership in the "great mass of working-people," women and children were excluded from membership in the working-class "aristocracy." Feminist scholars have shown that the basis of exclusion has often been framed in biological terms. To understand the roots of this ideology, it is necessary to study pre-capitalist relations of production in western Europe, and how power structures, legitimated through patriarchy, have been erected from them.²

Capitalism brought new relationships of property and domination. It brought into being a class which did not own the means of production, 'free' labourers who had to sell their labour power on the market. It started to dissolve all previous forms of

ownership. But men still owned their women body and soul long after they themselves ceased to be the property of other men...Patriarchy, the power of men as a sex to dispose of women's capacity to labour, especially in the family, has not had a direct and simple relationship to class exploitation (Rowbotham, 1976: xxxv).

Rowbotham (1976: 2) points out that women did engage in trades that were protected against competition from men, generally in areas linked to women's household production; for example, in the production of food, drink and clothing. With the spread of industrialisation, however, women were forced out of the more profitable trades. "Women's work became associated with low pay."

One of the frequent complaints in the early stages of the industrial revolution was that although women and children could find work, the men could not. This had very direct effects on authority in the family. But as Engels points out in his Conditions of the Working Class in England of 1844, wage-labour in early nineteenth century capitalism brought not freedom, but a reversal of the economic position of men and women. They were still tied not by affection but by economic necessity. Because other social changes had not accompanied the alteration of economic power in the family, the man felt degraded and humiliated and the woman went out to work for less pay, and consequently greater profit for the employer. For although the factory system began to undermine the economic and social hold of the working-class man over the women in his family, patriarchal authority continued in society as a whole. The ruling class could benefit from the assumption which was still strong that women belonged to men (Rowbotham, 1976: 55-56).

Men responded to the competitive threat of cheap female labour by pressing for legislation to exclude them from the more highly paid jobs and industries, "men managed to exclude women from the skilled, highly paid jobs where they were organised. Consequently, women and foreign workers, the Irish and later the Jews, were forced into low paid work" (ibid.: 59, emphasis added).

Barrett (1984: 135) draws attention to the connections between women's direct participation in wage labour and their indirect participation through dependence on men's wages. "The notion of women's dependence on the male wage has bolstered arguments for a family wage system in which a male breadwinner earns a wage adequate to support a wife and family." The historical evolution of the concept of the family wage can be directly connected to the struggles of organised male wage earners to better their material conditions. When men earn "family wages" they are receiving money to cover costs beyond their own subsistence requirements. In realising this concession from capital, wages are not then established to cover specific costs. Male breadwinners are not asked for proof that they actually support dependents. They are paid more in accordance with the idea of their general social and economic role as providers. But the idea has its dark side. For if men are seen to adopt this role, the wages earned by women and children need no longer be based on their subsistence requirements. These are to be met out of men's wages. Here is the basis of the split between that group of western European male labourers paid wages above costs of individual subsistence requirements, and that group that comes to be defined as cheap labour, paid wages that barely meet subsistence requirements, or fail altogether. In understanding how this split occurred historically, it is necessary to understand how the split is reinforced by biological arguments such that cheap labour is easily identified along gender, age and/or race/ethnicity, and how cheap labour can survive on such inadequate wages, through pre-capitalist relations of production.

Similarly, it cannot be doubted that the differentiation within the labour force developed on the basis of definitions of skill has made a substantial contribution to women's oppressed situation as wage workers. Women have frequently failed to establish recognition of the skills required by their work, and have consequently been in a weak bargaining position in a divided and internally competitive workforce. This is difficult to construe as simply an effect of capital's need for a differentiated workforce, since we need to know precisely how and why some groups of workers succeed in establishing definitions of their work as skilled. Some light is thrown on this problem by looking at the ways in which the capitalist labour force developed during the long transition period (Barrett, 1985: 165-166).

To illustrate her point, Barrett uses Babbage's account of rates of pay in a pin factory, as contained in Braverman's study (1974: 80). "The most interesting aspect of these figures, however, is that they demonstrate Marx's point that wages depend on costs of reproduction rather than the value of goods produced." Thus, women were paid half the rates men received, for the same task. An even greater discrepancy occurred between rates paid boys and those received by men, again for the same task. "This huge difference is not accounted for by variation in output; it reflected the assumption that some workers require more wages to reproduce themselves than others and suggests that Marx was correct to point to the 'historical and moral element' in the determination of the value of labour power" (Barrett, 1985: 166-167).

Unfortunately, Marx did not develop this line of reasoning. He did not explore the relations of production in feudal Europe that served to place a different value on the labour of women and children compared to that of men. Nor did he explore the manner in which, under capitalism, the labour power of individuals is valued not only according to impersonal market forces, but also according to biological criteria.

Consequently, Marx's labour theory of value must be re-examined, and this is the task undertaken in the following chapter.

To clarify the argument developed there, there are three concepts that follow from these introductory remarks requiring clarification. The term inequality will be used in a specific fashion, to refer not so much to individuals as to structures within which unequal relations are formed and which then serve to confer status or exploit individuals by virtue of membership in a certain group. The idea that certain groups are inferior to others, not because of the labour they perform, but simply because of biological criteria, has a long history in western Europe. O'Brien (1981), for example, demonstrates how women's biological reproductive functions were connected to those productive activities assigned to women in the social division of labour. And because women were judged to be inferior to men (an idea developed in western European philosophy and ramified in cultural, social, political and legal institutions), their productive activities, even when these had no relation to procreative functions, were also devalued. That is, work which bears the label "women's work" bears a stigma. Capitalist employers made use of this distinction when they employed women in wage labour. And the power of women in resisting, as has been demonstrated, was paradoxically limited because of the legitimation the distinction had achieved in the political and legal realms. And working-class men also operated with this fixed notion. And again, paradoxically, their fears of the economic threat posed by women's cheaper, devalued labour reflected historical and structural circumstances. Many men reacted by advocating further exclusion of women from labour organisation, thus

simultaneously producing and reproducing the structures of inequality. The concept structured inequality will be used in the sense noted here. It incorporates not only women, but also leads to further categories of cheap or devalued labour by age and/or race/ethnicity. The latter category must, in turn, be connected to an understanding of colonial and imperial expansion by western European powers. Underlying colonial and imperial expansion was a racist ideology towards colonised peoples, often grounded in biological arguments (for example, manifest destiny).

Ideological justifications, based on biological criteria, to create groups of cheap labourers cannot, however, be enforced if those labourers cannot subsist. Connected to the concept of structured inequality are the concepts of subsistence requirements and differential wages. Differential wages, following from the previous analysis, simply means that groups are not always paid wages that cover the costs of producing and reproducing the labour force. If a pure capitalist mode of production operated, wages would somehow have to meet this requirement (as Marx demonstrates in his discussion of socially necessary labour in his labour theory of value). Throughout the global economy, however, pre-capitalist relations of production continue. Those groups who receive wages below costs necessary for the survival of the group (subsistence requirements, or costs of production and reproduction of labour power) must either starve or meet their needs through a combination of wage labour and unpaid work in pre-capitalist relations of production. Another alternative developed fairly recently is services and payments provided by the capitalist welfare state.

The term subsistence requirements means the survival needs of specific categories of labourers (separated by structured inequality into visible groups marked by biological distinctions). Subsistence requirements can be met through wages, when wages are exchanged for commodities, or through unpaid work (for example, a housewife grows a vegetable garden to feed herself and her family). This definition raises a serious problem with Marx's labour theory of value. If all subsistence requirements were met through wage labour, then it would be possible to quantify labour power (and it would approach a universal base, since it would cover all unskilled labour groups). But that assumes a pure capitalist mode of production. As long as pre-capitalist relations remain important, qualitative criteria (since work goes unpaid) must supplement quantification, and different groups of labourers have different ways of meeting subsistence requirements, depending on the specific sets of pre-capitalist relations any one group uses. And these different paths to survival, in turn, reflect structures of inequality. For example, native peoples in British Columbia have recourse to a different set of pre-capitalist relations of production than do European women living in nuclear family households in the province's towns and cities. Nuclear family households are simultaneously connected to the capitalist economy and separate from it. They are connected by means of a reliance on commodities produced by the capitalist economy but themselves are not part of industrial production (Baxandall, Ewen and Gordon, 1976; Weinbaum and Bridges, 1976).

Following a detailed critique of the labour theory of value as indicated in these introductory remarks, the case study examines the

links of native peoples, Chinese and Japanese male labourers to pre-capitalist relations of production. The argument is made that these ties enabled salmon canners to hire each of these groups for wages which could not fully cover the costs of producing and reproducing the labour power of the group (ensuring a future generation of labourers).

The concept of cheap labourers is not new, although the attention it is receiving is a fairly recent development (since the 1960s). Specifically, there are three sets of explanatory models currently in use: dual labour market model, split labour market theory, and reserve army of labour. How do these contribute to the analysis developed here?

Dual Labour Market Model

The model is a product of research begun in the 1960s on segmented labour markets by, among others, Bluestone, Gordon, Doeringer and Piore. They observed that "urban blacks and other working poor people appeared to be operating in a labour market distinct from that of urban white males. It was not just that blacks and others in what was labeled the 'secondary labor market' were paid less; the labor market itself seemed to work differently for them" (Edwards, 1979: 165-166).

In an edited collection of essays by the group, Reich, Gordon and Edwards define labour market segmentation "as the historical process whereby political-economic forces encourage the division of the labor market into separate submarkets, or segments, distinguished by different labor market characteristics and behavioral rules" (Gordon, 1977: 108). Although the model points to structures of inequality, in this case those associated with labour markets, there is a serious problem with

it. Although analyses in this literature are descriptively rich, none develops a theoretical formulation of the historical process that has resulted in the formation of a dual labor market. There is a common point of departure from the labour market conditions of the 1960s, in the United States. Edwards (1979: 194) in fact, argues that this dual labour market was created not during the early phase of industrial capitalism, but after it achieved maturity. "Blacks, Hispanics, and women entered the wage-labor force during the regime of monopoly capitalism."

During American capitalism's first century it inherited and recruited a highly heterogeneous labor force, but it reshaped its wage laborers into an increasingly homogeneous class. In the twentieth century...the dichotomizing of the economy into core and periphery has introduced a new structural division into the conditions of employment...[and] institutionalized racial and sexual discrimination (ibid.: 163).

While this may be true for certain industries in the United States, it does not hold for the B.C. fishing industry, where cheap labour was employed from the start, the second half of the nineteenth century. And it certainly does not fit the historical accounts of the industrial revolution in western Europe.

There are several other problems with the model. By concentrating on labour markets, the authors ignore production except as it takes place within capitalist industries. There appears to be an assumption of a pure capitalist mode of production, in which all subsistence requirements must be met through wage labour and other commodity markets. Further, Edwards associates the split not with relations between different groups (class struggle within and between classes) but with the jobs they hold, "fundamental differences are not so much among

the workers as among the jobs that workers hold...we must look to the job structure" (ibid.: 166). There is an element of technological determinism here. He argues split labour markets occurred as a result of technological development. The nature of control capitalist employers must exert over their labour forces changes as the firm increases in size and as jobs become more complex. Thus, early industrial firms and those that continue to operate on the periphery of the economy utilise paternalistic methods of control, or "simple" control. Larger firms are a product of advanced monopoly capitalism and operate at the economy's core, requiring more complex types of control, or "technical" control. Edwards complicates matters even further by delineating a third labour market, one that arose as a result of complexity associated with the centralisation of capital, an increase of bureaucratic functions requiring a large number of white-collar and professional people, leading to "bureaucratic" control (ibid: 20-21, and 178). His is basically a descriptive account of American industry and the types of jobs created within it.

Because the model is based on an empirical account of various aspects of American industrialisation, the authors sometimes arrive at contradictory conclusions. Thus, Edwards finds three, not two, labour segments. At least he formally adopts a class perspective and tries to use it. Piore, on the other hand, departs from a Marxian analysis altogether. In Birds of Passage, while adopting a dual labour market hypothesis to examine migrant labour, he substitutes status for class. He argues migrant labourers are "but one part of a broader class of industrial labor" characterised by marginal commitment to industrial

work. "Particularly, they view their attachment to the job, and often to the labor market, as temporary and define themselves in terms of some other activity from which they derive their personal and social identity" (1979: 87). In addition to migrants, he includes youth (and, in earlier periods, children), housewives and peasant workers in this larger category. His stress on "personal and social identity" leads him to make some highly dubious conclusions, none of them supported by evidence. "Housewife-workers are like peasant-workers. Their major social and economic activity is as a wife and a mother, and they define themselves in these terms. The job is a source of income to supplement other family earnings. Sometimes it becomes a permanent part of the family budget. But often housewives work for specific consumer items" (ibid: 88, emphasis in original).

Piore fails to make a connection between unpaid production and cheap labour power. Among many other feminist writers, Armstrong and Armstrong (1975) disprove the hypothesis that most housewives engage in wage labour primarily for non-economic motives. Piore, in reaching such conclusions, appears to be adopting the very ideology that serves to define certain groups as cheap labour.

Like the migrant or peasant-worker, the housewife-worker can separate herself from the job and view it as purely instrumental. Like these other workers, too, she has a commitment that limits her interest in job security or career opportunity, and she has a source of other income, in the form of her husband's earning, which serves as a cushion in times of economic adversity (ibid.: 89).

Clearly, a model that allows one of its founders to make such dubious statements is problematic at best. The major problem here is a lack of theoretical direction. In describing the various job structures

and the groups who are channelled into them, the model becomes circular. Because segmentation exists, certain workers become identified with certain types of jobs. The characteristics of the workers and of their jobs become the same, and a vicious cycle appears for which the model does not offer any resolution.

Split Labour Market Theory

Bonacich has tried to push the findings of the dual labour market model in a new direction. She rejects the model because it is static. "Dual labor market theory tends to see a cluster of variables hanging together with technology at the core" (Bonacich, 1979: 36). Unfortunately, she does not question the basis of the model beyond its dependence on technology as the main variable. For technology, she substitutes "the dynamics of class struggle" (ibid.). While this enriches her analysis immeasurably, it does not resolve the theoretical limitations of the original model. Let us examine the points of similarity and divergence between her analysis and the one put forward in the following chapters.

The problematic is the same. Bonacich refers to a split labour market as "a difference in the price of labor between two or more groups of workers, holding constant their efficiency and productivity" (1976: 36). "Split labor markets develop dynamics which can perpetuate or increase the original price differential. The chief parties to the interaction are capital, higher priced labor and cheap labor" (ibid.: 39).

Split labor market theory is a theory of race and ethnic relations which emphasizes the material bases of racial and ethnic

antagonism. It tries to explain why race and ethnicity (or other similar "group" categories, such as gender) sometimes are invoked as bases for invidious treatment, by looking at the political and economic interests surrounding these categories. Put simply, it is a "class" theory of race and ethnicity (1979: 17).

Well worth emphasising is her insistence that the basic dynamic behind racial tensions over wage labour is class struggle, and not primordial group sentiment. "Ethnic, national and racial solidarity and antagonism are all socially created phenomena...which call upon primordial sentiments and bonds based upon common ancestry. But these sentiments and bonds are not just naturally there. They must be constructed and activated" (1980: 11).

What fits the evidence better is a picture of a capitalist class faced with (rather than creating) a labor market differentiated in terms of bargaining power (or price). Capital turns toward the cheaper labor pool as a more desirable work force, a choice consistent with the simple pursuit of higher profits. Higher priced labor resists being displaced, and the racist structures they erect to protect themselves are antagonistic to the interests of capital (1976: 44).

This is only partially true. A capitalist employer may face a split labour market. But in making a choice to hire in one part of it rather than another, or to hire from both but segregate labour in specific job categories, the capitalist reproduces the structures in new ways. During that process of production and reproduction, old conflicts are reaffirmed, new ones may be set in motion, or attempts may be made to resolve the split in a specific industry. This type of flux becomes evident when one studies an industry over its entire history. Thus, in the B.C. fishing industry, salmon canners created their labour forces from groups categorised as cheap labour. But they further cemented and split these distinctions by filling specific jobs from one group of

labourers rather than another. For example, native women washed fish, for piece rates lower than wages paid to Chinese male butchers. Jobs became typed according to the race and gender of the group hired to do them. This structure affected others. Thus, middlemen contractors (both Chinese and native) had a new field of employment to which they could recruit cheap labour groups from various geographical areas. Given employment opportunities, native villages changed their cyclical economic activities to incorporate wage labour in the canneries. And the segregated job and wage structure, once in place, did not remain static. For example, as Chinese male labourers developed skills important to the industry, they began to demand higher wages. Canners responded by mechanising the butchering operations, and this changed the job structure in a new direction. Rapid urbanisation led to the influx of new groups of cheap labourers (for example, East Indian women), and this had serious consequences for those groups in place. Finally, white male fishers began to organise the entire industry, beginning with the small sector of higher priced white male labour in the plants and spreading to include all categories of cheap labour. In the process, the Chinese male labour force was displaced, when negotiated union agreements displaced the Chinese contract system as the means of pricing labour power.

It is difficult to use split labour market theory in describing these types of processes. The theory serves to describe what is found, but not to explain it. Part of the problem here lies in the global patterns chosen by Bonacich. For example, in her article on U.S. black/white race relations, she covers the entire American economy. In

an article published three years later, she has expanded her field of interest to include all non-white groups classified as cheap labour in the United States, including the Chinese and Japanese. In a future project, she plans to include a study of how women are used as cheap labour. Her newer interests also point her to a study of middlemen minorities and the growth of small businesses, for example, by Koreans in the United States.

Her work is enriched by a historical account of the processes leading to split labour markets. She traces these to the development of capitalism in western Europe, where a "white" proletariat emerged, with relatively high wages, while imperialism and the underdevelopment of the third world led to the creation of cheap "colored" labour. These two processes constitute the split labour market (1979: 24, Figure 1). When she turns to a study of female wage labour, she will most likely add a dimension to her model to incorporate gender inequality, both in western Europe and elsewhere. She also notes the importance of connecting cheap labour to its origins in pre-capitalist economies. "The phenomenon of sojourning tends to lower the price of labour for a number of reasons. Migrant workers often leave their families behind in the village, freeing employers from having to pay for the maintenance and reproduction of the family" (ibid.: 22). However, she then goes on to make the following statement.

Undoubtedly capital sometimes plays a part in maintaining the temporary status of immigrant workers precisely because of its cheapening effects. Still, as capitalism develops, problems of constant personnel turnover may outweigh these benefits, especially if the available non-immigrant labor force is very costly and troublesome. It should not be surprising, therefore, to find cases of capital attempting to break the sojourner's bond to the pre-

capitalist village and tie him/her permanently to wage labor (ibid.: 23)

In British Columbia, the provincial state became an important party to disputes between capital and white male labour. However, capitalists themselves took sides that reflected their degree of dependence on cheap labour. Salmon canners were opposed to restricting Chinese and Japanese immigration, but their opposition lessened in correspondence to the availability of other cheap labour groups. Perhaps because of the seasonal nature of the industry, salmon canners do not appear to have tried to make permanent wage labourers out of sojourners. By relying on Chinese contractors, they appear to have had little to do with individual labourers. The solution adopted to eliminate the threat of sojourners to more highly paid labourers was to restrict the immigration of certain groups to the province.

But there is a more serious point of disagreement with Bonacich's argument. She concludes that the spread of capitalism erodes and eventually eliminates pre-capitalist sectors. While this may or may not be true in the long run, she does not pay attention to the connections between pre-capitalist relations of production and the formation of cheap labour forces. "Within a capitalist economy, the household can be seen as a pre-capitalist remnant. It is a sector of retarded economic development, still organized on the principle of unpaid labor." "Household production is similar to 'native' economies in colonized territories. It is a backward sector from which people 'migrate' into the capitalist labor market" (ibid.:52). The argument to be developed in the following chapters is that pre-capitalist relations of production

are not simply "remnants." They allow capitalists to price labour power below costs of production/reproduction.

In pre-capitalist modes of production, people mainly work for their own subsistence...As a result, the capitalist employer need not pay the worker his or her complete subsistence, but only that part of it which is necessary to sustain the worker at that moment. In other words, the subsistence of his family, including health care, education, and housing, can be left out of the wage calculation. This enables employers in transitional economies to "earn" extraordinary rates of surplus value and at the same time to undersell competitors who use fully proletarianized work-forces (1980: 18).

This is precisely the manner in which cheap labour and its connections to pre-capitalist relations of production will be used. The point of disagreement stems from Bonacich's too facile dismissal of pre-capitalist relations as merely backward. There is an important dynamic whereby capitalist wage relations serve to simultaneously erode and reproduce "backwardness," or underdevelopment.

The proponents of both dual labour market and split labour market models use Marxian class analysis as their point of departure. But nowhere do they undertake an investigation of the basis of that model, Marx's labour theory of value, in order to see if and how the more recent understanding of cheap labour can be applied to it. Rather than beginning from an assumption that cheap labour fits non-problematically within Marxian class analysis, the task in Chapter 2 is to explore the original theory and test if for fit.

Beyond the Concept of Reserve Army of Labour

Cheap labourers are often characterised as belonging to a "relative surplus population," or reserve army of labour.

It is, however, precisely this coincidence between nonmarket status and real or potential market position which constitutes the major problem for the reserve army formulation. Why should blacks, women, or other groups be concentrated in the industrial reserve army? Moreover, how do we account for the historical persistence of that concentration?...[W]hat is often critical for the part of the industrial reserve army composed of blacks and women is that these people are full- or part-time participants in something other than a capitalist labor process - for example, housework or welfare transfer programs. In other words, participation in those other organizations provides the means for material existence when an individual is not engaged in value-producing activities; and, at the same time, participation in those organizations confers a status separate from class position (Thomas, 1982: S89).

Connelly initially developed the concept in order to understand the connections between women's household and wage labour (Connelly, 1978; Connelly and MacDonald, 1983). In their more recent work, however, Connelly and MacDonald (1985) have begun to develop a theoretical understanding of the use of women as cheap labourers that transcends the concept of reserve army.³ They are studying the "modes of production" literature and questioning its applicability to an understanding of how cheap labour is structured in the Nova Scotia fishery. By moving in this direction, they are addressing the critique raised by Thomas.

The concept of reserve army of labour is useful as a concept. It can be used to point to the ways in which specific groups straddle non-monetary and monetary spheres of production, becoming available as cheap labour if and when jobs are opened to them. While Marx argued the reserve army served to depress the wages of permanently employed labourers, split labour markets buffer the more highly paid and secure white male labour force from competition from the "secondary" sector. In the latter, women compete with other groups for the least desirable

and lowest paid jobs. Connelly's classic, Last Hired First Fired, demonstrates how Canadian women have participated through their dual connection to both household and capitalist production.

Problems arise when one attempts to expand the concept into a theory, for reasons similar to those associated with the dual labour market model. The concept is essentially a static one. And here is precisely where Marx's labour theory of value itself becomes problematic. Marx developed the theory, assuming a pure capitalist mode of production and equating wage labour with the white male wage labour force. Although he recognised the existence of cheap labour, he did not analyse its importance beyond serving to keep wages close to subsistence levels, by means of competition for jobs. He did not see it as part of the working class, using instead terms like lumpen-proletariat, a residue of unemployed labour power.

These introductory remarks make it clear that this lumpen-proletariat is an integral part of capitalist production, precisely because it is situated on the margins of the capitalist economy. In this respect Marx was both color and gender blind. He associated the proletariat with the western European male working class. Researchers who study cheap labour in all its manifestations and who adopt a Marxian class analysis need to understand the potential contradictions involved, contradictions that stem from a limitation in Marx's theoretical conceptualisation of labour power. The following chapter attempts such a critique.

The remainder of the thesis is a demonstration of the theoretical argument developed in Chapter 2. The B.C. fishing industry lends itself

well to such a demonstration because wage labour of any kind was scarce when capitalists first decided to prosecute the fisheries. In other words, they had to create a labour force. Initially they employed native fishers, but soon European men voluntarily entered the industry as fishers. Rather than employing the latter for the inside work, canners segregated the two types of labour (fishing from processing, although some overlap did occur, primarily around work that bridged the two, such as mending and making nets and the work of tendermen). European fishers resisted proletarianisation, insisting they be able to negotiate the price of their catches. Shoreworkers sold their labour power for wages, negotiated either individually or, more frequently in the early period, through contractors who engaged to hire plant labour forces for individual plants. And fishers and shoreworkers tended to come from different gender and racial groups. While native men (sometimes with the help of native women, although the women were not hired by canners to fish), European and Japanese men fished, native women and children, Chinese men (sometimes boys were included) and Japanese women worked inside the plants. The latter groups did not share tasks with one another, but were segregated, each group performing a distinctive set of tasks in each plant or cannery. In Chapter 3, a short history of the industry is given to provide a backdrop to the rest of the thesis.

In Chapter 4, the relations of production and exchange characteristic of native peoples as a whole are briefly examined. The interrelationship between those relations and capitalist fishing interests is then examined in some detail. Chapter 5 mirrors Chapter 4,

examining the use of Chinese labour, and, briefly, Japanese labour as well (Japanese men were fishers, but their employment in the early period bore similarities to that of Chinese men). Because inequalities linked to gender and race historically predate industrial capitalism, and technically are not a feature of the economic laws of capitalism, they must be enforced outside the economic sphere. Legal barriers reinforce economic discrimination, and the B.C. state has played an important role in denying political rights to native, Chinese, Japanese and East Indian peoples. While Chapter 2 concludes with a short theoretical discussion of the capitalist state, Chapter 6 briefly examines the policies of the B.C. and federal states in denying liberal democratic rights to specific populations.

Capitalists try to employ labour power as cheaply as possible, below its costs of production and reproduction, and pressure their political representatives to pass and enforce legislation to guarantee gender and racial differences remain unequally structured in terms of political and economic opportunities. In this they are resisted. Chapter 6 concludes with a discussion of the granting of the franchise to all groups after the end of the second world war. It took decades of struggle, but the groups against whom the state discriminated were finally able to employ the principles of liberal democracy to realize political rights. However, the erosion of political inequality threatened the structures of economic inequality. Another effect of class struggle was the emergence of the welfare state. As workers struggle to realize economic gains and end gender and racial discrimination, capitalists involve the state in the increasing costs of

labour power. Social services forced by both workers and capitalists on the state mean that employers continue to pay labour power below the costs of its production and reproduction. Class struggle becomes entrenched within the political as well as the economic spheres. And since the end of the war, the state has constantly been called upon to mediate even those struggles that do take place on the factory floor.

While Chapter 6 analyses some of the political struggles that affected the organisation of fish plant labour forces, the next chapter discusses their organisation into an industrial trade union. Cannery workers scored their greatest victory, in being able to employ labour to their own best advantage, in the early period of the industry. While fishers were first to organise unions, shoreworkers struggled with employers and contractors in a variety of other ways. However, their struggles mirrored the divisions established by cannery workers, as did the early union efforts of fishers. During the second world war, fishers came to realise they would have to overcome those divisions in order to realise their interests. With the help of a leadership drawn from the ranks of the Communist Party, they began to organise an industrial union. The immediate result was not a unified membership with equal representation and participation from all sectors. Shoreworkers were organised along the lines established by cannery workers, and union agreements mirrored these racial and gender divisions. The push to end them had to come from both union leaders and the grass roots, and the first battles were actually fought at the level of the union locals. Because fishers were at the forefront of union organising, their interests predominated for several decades. The history of the struggle between fishers and shoreworkers

within the union, and the struggle of the union with the fish companies is outlined in Chapter 7. The thesis concludes by bringing forward some of the theories and concepts that were left out of the argument, posing questions requiring further research and thought.

Methodology

There are basically two aspects to this study, which at some point become inseparably intertwined. The field work on shoreworkers in British Columbia was undertaken in conjunction with a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council funded study, the Fish and Ships Research project. The project lasted approximately four years (from 1981 to 1984). Its mandate was to investigate the British Columbia fishing industry, to identify problems experienced and the future prospects of an industry characterised by many as being in a state of crisis. The project was a collective enterprise, and many of the insights gained here owe much to hours of discussion with group members. Pat Marchak served as both project leader and thesis advisor, and served in a number of indispensable roles for me. I am very grateful to her for being both critic and supporter, roles that are not necessarily contradictory. However, any faults with the study are entirely the author's own.

Before becoming involved with the project, a certain ideological predisposition had been developed, stemming principally from the works of E.P. Thompson (1978, 1979) and Raymond Williams (1977). There is a growing body of literature attempting to theorise the active, rather than passive involvement of labourers in producing and reproducing the

various structures that form the capitalist economy. What it stresses is the consciousness and resistance of labourers, or how the working class produces and reproduces itself. This was a point of orientation in turning to a study of shoreworkers in the B.C. fishing industry.

I was partially employed throughout the three years the project was funded. In the summer of 1981, I was assigned to do an ethnography of Steveston. However, while Steveston had been an important center of fishing activity in the early history of the industry, and while it was still an important port and employment center, a split had occurred between labour and residence. Historically, Steveston was an important fishing village, especially for Japanese fishers and their families. However, in the 1980s, many if not most of the fishers using the wharf facilities, and the labourers in the huge B.C. Packers' Imperial Plant located on the waterfront, did not reside in Steveston. Rather, the community itself was part of Richmond and the Greater Vancouver Regional District. I soon concluded that an ethnography of Steveston was not necessarily an ethnography of a fishing community, and began to search for other methods, chiefly historical, to understand how the shift had occurred. For example, I joined the Steveston Historical Society and attended some of the monthly meetings over the next two years.

Two other project members were assigned to do ethnographies of Prince Rupert in northern British Columbia, and Tofino/Ucluelet, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The following summer, in 1982, I spent five weeks in Prince Rupert, along with several group members. The previous fall, the survey portion of the project had been started, and we had begun to formally interview shoreworkers in the greater Vancouver

area. The trip to Prince Rupert was undertaken to continue administering questionnaires, to visit plants, and to talk with various people connected to the industry (plant foremen, union organisers, fishers, senior shoreworkers and newer arrivals, for example). The two largest fish plants, both owned by B.C. Packers, are located in Steveston and Prince Rupert. The northern Skeena river had been an important center of salmon canning activity, providing many nearby native villages with work. But only one plant, Cassiar, was still operating. We visited the area and spoke to local historians and participants. We were also given tours of B.C. Packers' Prince Rupert Plant, Seal Cove and the Co-op plant, all located on the Prince Rupert waterfront. A number of visits were made to Imperial in Steveston, and Canfisco's Home plant, located just outside Vancouver's China and Japan towns, was also visited. Most of these plants were in full operation at the time they were visited, and we were thus able to observe labour allocation and the various tasks performed, especially on the salmon canning lines, but also on herring roe popping lines, the salmon roe preparation for the Japanese market, and fresh fish and filleting operations. Back in Steveston, Duncan Stacey gave us an extensive tour of the old Scottish-Canadian cannery, which he is in the process of turning into a museum that displays the various technical aspects of fishing and processing, and their historical evolution.

It was impossible to understand the current structure of the plant labour forces without trying to piece together their history. While there is a very rich literature on fishing and on the technical aspects of processing, little had been done on shoreworkers themselves. After

getting my feet wet, I turned to various historical documents, trying to piece together this missing body of historical information. I have not broken down the period of time studied, as historians usually do, because I was primarily interested in trying to reconstruct a total picture of the changes the labour force has undergone. The details, and some that appear in the following chapters may require further research and correction, still need the careful attention historians bring to their craft. Lacking such studies, I have attempted to reconstruct a very rough history that tries to outline the major events and turning points. Again, I owe thanks to certain individuals.

Alex Gordon, and his wife Margaret, gave many hours of their time piecing together Alex's involvement as the first United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union shoreworker organiser, from the mid-1940s to the 1960s. George North, editor of The Fisherman (the union paper) during that period was also very supportive of the research. And, finally, Keith Ralston provided both support and a historian's precision for detail in trying to reconstruct the historical record (although he would disapprove of the time span covered here as too long). Throughout, the members of the Fish and Ships Research Project listened, criticised, and encouraged.

In addition to the growing body of historical work on the industry, a number of primary sources were used. The Fisherman was exhaustively combed for its record of how fishers organised shoreworkers, and how shoreworkers came to fight for their own interests within the union. The point of view of salmon canners was obtained by looking through the company files of J.H. Todd and Sons Ltd., a medium-

sized fishing firm and a pioneer in the industry absorbed in the mid-1950s by B.C. Packers and Canadian Fishing Company (Canfisco). In addition, some of the files of Henry Doyle, a pioneer canner prominent in establishing B.C. Packers, the largest company in the provincial fisheries, were examined. To gain an idea of the struggles waged in the Vancouver labour movement, the minute books of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council (1933-1948) and the Hotel, Restaurant and Culinary Employees and Bartenders Union, Local 28 (1933 to 1948), were perused.⁴ The period was chosen for comparison with the formation of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union in 1945, and an examination of the impact of the second world war on union organisation. When it was realised that a history of the industry as a whole was necessary, in addition to looking up secondary sources, the Sessional Papers were researched for the period 1871 to 1930; in particular, all of the annual reports of the fisheries officers and Indian agents responsible for British Columbia were studied.

There was a stage when the more information was obtained, the greater the confusion in making sense of it all. To understand the industry, and the part played by shoreworkers, theoretically, the concepts of reserve army and split labour market theory were explored but rejected because they didn't allow for an understanding of the history here as a process. That understanding came only with a going back to the original source, Volume One of Marx's Capital. The elements of an explanation can be drawn together using Marx's understanding of the evolution of the labour process within the capitalist mode of

production. However, there is a missing link in the theory which must be developed. That is the task of the next chapter.

¹ A formal definition of mode of production is provided in Chapter 2. A shorter definition that helps elaborate these introductory remarks is provided by Burawoy (1978: 268): "Throughout the three volumes of Capital, Marx insists that the capitalist mode of production is not just the production of things but simultaneously the production of social relations and also the production of ideas about those relations, a lived experience or ideology of those relations."

² The literature on patriarchy is extensive and problematic, in that many debates are raging over its connection to capitalism. Two excellent studies that give a history of the debate are Barrett's Women's Oppression Today (1985) and a collection of essays edited by Eisenstein, Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism (1979).

³ During the course of a joint session, when we were delivering papers at the Canadian Agricultural and Rural Studies Conference, held in June, 1986, at the University of Manitoba, Pat Connelly acknowledged that there are limitations in using the concept of reserve army of labour.

⁴ All four sources may be found in the Special Collections section of The University of British Columbia library. The minutes of Local 28 were examined because the industry employed a large number of Chinese men, a source of contention within the union (over whether or not they should be organised). However, the recording of the minutes of meetings was very uneven. In particular, a number of crises occurred and no minutes were kept. Thus, the omissions were in some ways more interesting than the information noted, and would require far more research to trace the source and nature of the conflicts.

CHAPTER 2

Structured Inequality: The Missing Link in Marx's Labour Theory of Value

The Concept of Value

Marx's most complete discussion of the transformation of labour under capitalism is contained in Volume One of Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production (1967). Central to his argument is the concept of value, the expression of products of human labour in terms of utility (use values), of exchange (exchange values) and/or of both. In the capitalist mode of production,¹ relations involving the exchange of products become the dominant form for expressing value; that is, value is attached to the products of human labour. However, both the products and their value are expressions of the capacity of human beings to labour; that is, their ability to add something extra to material reality (in other words, value). When value is attached directly to the things (objects) created rather than to the creators (subjects) or to their abilities/ capacities, then the possibility exists for the producers (subjects) to become separated from their products (objects). "Every product of labour is, in all states of society, a use-value; but it is only at a definite historical epoch in a society's development that such a product becomes a commodity, viz., at

the epoch when the labour spent on the production of a useful article becomes expressed as one of the objective qualities of that article, i.e., as its value" (Marx, 1967: 61).

Labour does not simply involve an acting upon or transformation of material reality (nature). The labourer develops consciousness of her/himself through the process of labour (as both subject and object, since the labourer acts upon material reality but is, at the same time, constrained by it). And, most important, the labour process is seldom a solitary activity. It is cooperative because human beings cannot survive alone. Cooperation, in turn, involves division of labour, a crucial concept to be explored in more detail in a later section. As long as producers remain in control of both their labour power and the products of that labour, social conditions favour cooperation and egalitarian relations. However, when value is socially recognised as residing in products and the products of human labour become detached from those who produce them, then the conditions not of cooperation but of exploitation exist. Products are simultaneously alienated from producers and appropriated by non-producers, precisely because value now adheres to the products (objects), and not to the labour process itself. Capitalist exploitation involves the further stage of using the objects of labour to exploit the very people who create them, precisely through the predominance of exchange over use values. Specifically, capitalist exploitation involves the separation of producers from the means necessary to ensure survival (that is, the production and reproduction of labour power). Capitalists (non-producers) acquire control over those means through the institution of private property (private

ownership of the means of subsistence encoded in law, and enforced through the power of the state). Capitalists acquire control over the products of labour by forcing producers to acquire their means of subsistence in exchange relations, by buying back the products of labour as commodities. Value now visibly adheres to objects in exchange (expressed in money form) allowing capitalists to control both the production and the exchange of products/commodities.

For Marx the value of a commodity expresses the particular historical form that the social character of labour has under capitalism, as the expenditure of social labour power. Value is not a technical relation but a social relation between people which assumes a particular material form under capitalism, and hence appears as a property of that form (Mohun 1983: 507)

Marx's discussion of value here differs from the way the term is used in the introductory chapter. The earlier discussion raises the problem of the missing link. As Mohun notes, the value of a commodity expresses the social character of labour. Labour is primarily a cooperative activity, otherwise Marx could never posit labour power as socially necessary (as an abstract entity). As a social process, therefore, it is possible that the products of certain groups of producers can be valued not only in terms of use and exchange criteria, but also in terms of who produces them. Although the labour of all members of a society, or community, or household, is socially necessary (in the abstract sense of labour necessary to produce and reproduce society without taking individual labour into consideration), it does not follow that the same value attaches to the products if inequalitarian relations exist and are structured by inflexible criteria, such as gender, age and race.

In western Europe before 1750, not only did men and women engage in different types of labour activity, producing different but socially necessary products, but "women's work," that is, the very labour process engaged by the female gender, was valued less highly than the labour process of males. In particular, women's labour and the products of their labour were connected to the most important distinguishing characteristic between males and females, biological reproduction. The specific tasks associated with the biological production and reproduction of labour power became designated "women's work" and devalued because they were seen to be tasks associated with biological rather than social or cultural functions (O'Brien, 1983). As exchange mechanisms developed, men increasingly entered exchange relations, while women were confined to producing use values, and remained bound to the household. "Private property transformed the relations between men and women within the household only because it also radically changed the political and economic relations in the larger society...With time, production by men specifically for exchange purposes developed, expanded, and came to overshadow the household's production for use" (Sacks, 1975: 216). In some cultures, women themselves enter the exchange network as products. Men exchange women for other forms of wealth. Rubin (1975: 204-205) notes: "We need, for instance, an analysis of the evolution of sexual exchange along the lines of Marx's discussion in Capital of the evolution of money and commodities."

Marx does acknowledge the historical use of humans themselves as commodities; in particular, in his discussion of slavery in the colonies. However, he links the commodification of human beings and the

commodification of their labour power as part of the same process, slavery predating but contributing to capitalist exploitation. In fact, because more labour can be extracted from the second process (expressed as surplus labour necessary to create surplus value), he argues the proletarianisation of labour is the more exploitative relation. The end result is a blurring of the distinction between the two, as indicated in the following passage.

Whilst the cotton industry introduced child-slavery in England, it gave in the United States a stimulus to the transformation of the earlier, more or less patriarchal slavery, into a system of commercial exploitation. In fact, the veiled slavery of the wage-workers in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world (Marx, 1967: 759-760).

It can be inferred from this quote that Marx viewed the use of women and children as commodities by men through patriarchal family relations, the slavery of the colonies, and wage labour as comparable forms of exploitation, tending towards the latter. He connects the concept of surplus value to the commodification of labour power, to relations of exploitation limited to those between capitalist employers and wage labourers. Pre-existing relations of exploitation, within the European family or in the colonies, are seen as leading to this purely capitalist form but are not acknowledged to determine the new form of exploitation, leading to a different valuation of labour power within capitalist exploitation. The oversight is partially due to Marx's focus on only one type of wage labourer, European men. Although he cites numerous examples of how women and children are exploited under capitalism, the proletarian condition curiously belongs to men. There are many passages indicating this paradox, but the following suffices to

illustrate the problem. "For 'protection' against the 'serpent of their agonies,' the labourers must put their heads together, and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier that shall [sic] prevent the very workers from selling, by voluntary contract with capital, themselves and their families into slavery and death" (Marx, 1967: 302). The active force is clearly the male working class.

Marx does not develop the point that exploitative relations within the family structure the availability and value of labour power to capitalist employers differently. Although the commodification of labour power (forcing labourers to treat their ability to labour as an object to be exchanged for means of subsistence) exploits all workers, the "free" labourer remains responsible for the production and reproduction of his own labour power. This is not the case for those who are themselves owned as commodities. The slave owner assumes responsibility for the production and reproduction of the labour power of his slaves, as does the husband/father for his wife and children. In fact, the European male working class used this to bargain over the price of its labour power. If men collectively within society are responsible for the production and reproduction of the members of their families, then the value of their labour power incorporates the family unit, and not simply men as individual labourers. And because men are responsible for women and children, the labour power of the latter is valued below the costs necessary for its production and reproduction.

The Commodification of Labour Power

The difference between the way Marx employs the term value and the dimension added in the present analysis can be traced to the process whereby labour power is itself commodified.

Value is not something intrinsic to a single commodity, considered apart from its exchange for another, but rather reflects a division of labour of independent commodity producers, the social nature of whose labour is only revealed in the act of exchange. Value therefore has a purely social reality, and its form can only appear in the social relation between commodity and commodity (Mohun, 1983: 509).

Marx uses his concept of value to demonstrate that, historically, exchange relations widen the sphere of social relations. When production remains confined to meeting immediate needs, then social organisation need not be extensive. When exchange networks begin to be established, as long as production is still primarily oriented to fulfilling the needs of the local community, exchange relations tend to occur only at the social boundaries between communities, or are undertaken by marginal groups, like nomads (Marx, 1967: 88; Wolf, 1982). However, the very process of exchange gradually reorients social relationships until production itself becomes oriented to exchange (Wolf demonstrates how this process took centuries, gradually incorporating the entire globe). This transitional stage is complete when products assume the commodity form. Products no longer express utility, but are now expressed as equivalents of one another. The commodity money comes to assume the expression of equivalency, allowing the measure of all other commodities in terms of money (Marx, 1967: Part I). Thus, the relation that predominates is exchange of objects rather than their production. These objects assume value only in the process of exchange

or circulation, and that value is a comparative expression (commodities are compared to one another through prices attached to them). "The value of a commodity can only be expressed after its production, in the use value of another commodity, which, in developed capitalism, is money, the universal equivalent of value" (Mohun, 1983: 511).

Production precedes exchange, and more important, the two processes are separated. Value now only comes into the picture during the second process, when products circulate as commodities. The money economy, the site of commodity circulation, is separate from the site of production. There is a time lag between the two processes. And here is the manner in which industrial capitalism develops. Before value is attached to commodities, extra value is created and appropriated during production. But value is nothing more than the expenditure of labour on material reality, changing it to meet the needs of subsistence. Exchange relations mask this fact, and this is crucial for the emergence of industrial capitalist production. Since value now attaches to products rather than labour, it becomes possible to commodify labour itself. The crucial distinction here is between labour, the activity of producers, and labour power, their ability to engage in that activity. As capitalists acquire control over production, they begin to make this distinction, buying not actual labour but simply the ability of people to labour. The result is a complete severance of the labourer from the products of her/his labour, since the employer now dictates how labour is to be expended (Marx, 1967: Ch. VI). The employer is not interested in labourers being able to survive through production (survival is taken care of on the money market when wages are exchanged for commodities).

Rather, the employer wants to create something extra for himself, and he can only do this by employing labour, since only labour can create value.

Labourers will not voluntarily come to capitalist employers, but must be forced by having their means of production taken out of their control. The only way left for them to survive is to offer their labour power for sale. This sale occurs before the expenditure of labour, and its value is determined by market forces. Labourers compete with one another to find employment, and their wages become the product of impersonal market forces (the same that determine the pricing of any commodity), subject to class struggle. However, if this were the end of the process, then there would be no way for the employers to acquire extra value for themselves.

Our capitalist has two objects in view: in the first place, he wants to produce a use-value that has a value in exchange, that is to say, an article destined to be sold, a commodity; and secondly, he desires to produce a commodity whose value shall [sic] be greater than the sum of the values of the commodities used in its production, that is, of the means of production and the labour-power, that he purchased with his good money in the open market. His aim is to produce not only a use-value, but a commodity also; not only use-value, but value; not only value, but at the same time surplus-value (Marx, 1967: 186).

The value of labour power is determined by the costs necessary to produce and reproduce it. That value is not only socially determined (the ability of producers to meet their subsistence needs), but, in the capitalist mode of production, is determined by the exchange relations between wages and commodities necessary for subsistence. However, commodities alone are insufficient to assure survival needs, because the production and reproduction of labour power takes place outside

industrial production. This marks another crucial difference between commodities in general and the commodity labour power, but Marx fails to analyse the implications of the difference.

[T]hough labour power appears as a commodity for sale on the market, it is not produced like other commodities. The production of labour power is an aspect of the biological and social reproduction of workers as human beings. This complex process of reproduction involves social relations which are in general different from capitalist or commodity relations. In well developed capitalist societies, for example, labour power is reproduced by household labour which does not receive a wage; in less developed capitalist countries labour power is often reproduced through surviving non-capitalist modes of production. These processes have their own logic and ideology; the pure logic of capitalist relations cannot assure in and of itself the reproduction of labour power (Foley, 1983: 266).

Because a separate logic operates in the production and reproduction of labour power, wages alone cannot meet survival needs. Unfortunately, Marx tended to ignore this crucial fact, mainly because he was looking at the operation of a pure capitalist mode of production, one in which the production and reproduction of labour power is itself somehow incorporated within capitalist relations.

The capital given in exchange for labour-power is converted into necessities, by the consumption of which the muscles, nerves, bones, and brains of existing labourers are reproduced, and new labourers are begotten. Within the limits of what is strictly necessary, the individual consumption of the working class is, therefore, the reconversion of the means of subsistence given by capital in exchange for labour-power, into fresh labour-power at the disposal of capital for exploitation. It is the production and reproduction of that means of production so indispensable to the capitalist: the labourer himself (Marx, 1967: 572).

Costs of Producing and Reproducing Labour Power

At this point, the distinction Engels makes between labour and work proves to be a useful one. In a footnote, Engels notes: "The English

language has the advantage of possessing different words for the two aspects of labour here considered. The labour which creates Use-Value, and counts qualitatively is Work, as distinguished from Labour; that which creates Value and counts quantitatively, is Labour as distinguished from Work" (Marx, 1967: 47, footnote 1). Weinbaum and Bridges develop the significance of the distinction: "Just as in all societies people work while in capitalist societies people labour, so in all societies people reproduce themselves, but in capitalist societies they consume. In capitalist societies, the market serves as the bridge between the production of things and the reproduction of people" (Weinbaum and Bridges, 1976: 90). In a pure capitalist mode of production, there would no longer be a distinction between work and labour, because all labour would create commodities capable of meeting all of the subsistence needs of the population. To date, such a pure capitalist mode of production does not exist anywhere in the world.

Therefore, to the extent that work continues, the costs of producing and reproducing labour power are not only borne in the industrial workplace, through the expenditure of labour, but also take place outside, through the expenditure of work. And while it is possible to attach a price to labour, since it is a commodity, work does not enter the sphere of monetary exchange and thus remains without a price. Marx argues labour power finds its price on the market through the operation of impersonal market forces, and measures it in terms of the costs of commodities necessary for survival. But there is an added cost that remains unmeasured, and it is precisely this cost without value over which male labourers and capitalists struggle in negotiating

wages. Labourers want the full costs of producing and reproducing family labour included in the wage (although there is no quantitative measure of that cost, nor a standard for how many people are to be included in the family unit, costs involved for each age group, etc.). Capitalists, on the other hand, try to pay wages close to market rates, or below market rates, since they use the argument of the "family wage" to price the labour power of women and children below necessary costs of production and reproduction. In other words, they turn the arguments used by male labourers against them, in pegging wages of a significant proportion of the population below the wages of male proletarians, causing a downward pressure on the latter.

Although work occurs outside capitalist production, it becomes dependent on it (for example, the industrialisation of housework involves unpaid work in the home, but the objects necessary for work are produced in factories and must be purchased with wages). The crucial point here (and the missing link in Marx's labour theory of value) is that, to the extent that work continues to produce and reproduce labour power, less labour is necessary, thus allowing the capitalist to pay wages below the costs of production and reproduction. As noted, it is here that class struggle becomes important.

In Great Britain, when women and children were legislated out of factories through the successful political organisation of male labourers, men assumed the costs necessary not only for their own survival, but also those of their families. To the extent that women and children no longer laboured, their time was freed to work without pay in the home, thereby lessening the costs of production/reproduction.

Men negotiated with employers for a "family wage," thereby cheapening the labour power of women and children even further because women and children were not organised by men. Men viewed the paid labour of women and children as a threat to themselves, and used political methods to keep them out of wage labour, rather than drawing them into economic organisations. The ideology associated with structured inequality played an important role not only in determining how male labourers would perceive their interests, but also in determining how employers would structure their labour forces. For the male working class, consciousness of similarities in the conditions of all people who must labour for wages was obscured by sexist (and racist) ideas of the value of the labour of men compared to that of women and children (and extended to peoples from other countries used by capitalists as cheap labour). The end result is the valuation of labour power using two different types of criteria, that set which prices the value of labour power above the costs of production and reproduction of individual labour power, and that which sets it below those costs.

The two types of criteria, however, are a historical product and do not form part of the logic of capitalism itself (except to the extent that capitalist employers will always seek to minimize their costs of production). Therefore, attempts to eradicate the distinction between the two types of labour process become the object of class struggle, within the working class as well as between classes. The women's movement has fought this battle, and continues it. But not only women are involved. When European capitalists expanded industrial production outside western Europe, they sought to proletarianise the peoples

indigenous to the new areas in the same way as European women. Instead of using a sexist ideology, they were able to employ the racist ideas associated with colonisation. Once again, political realities served their purposes well. It was more difficult to use gender criteria outside western Europe because gender inequality did not necessarily exist in other parts of the globe, and was seldom structured in a manner similar to the home country. Both Leacock and Engels argue gender inequality is historically grounded in the transformation of social, cultural, and economic relations from a basis in cooperation to one of exploitation (Engels, 1981; Leacock, 1954 and 1981).

In developing industrial production outside western Europe, existing relations of production were not necessarily destroyed. In creating a cheap labour force, it was to the capitalists' advantage if the work necessary to human survival could continue apace, as long as it did not interfere with the ability of employers to hire labour power when needed. In other words, relations of production existing prior to industrialisation continued but were transformed, made dependent on capitalist exchange relations. For example, in British Columbia, as natural resources were exploited by capitalists or destroyed in the process of industrial expansion, native peoples had a more difficult time in acquiring or using those resources to survive. They therefore became dependent on commodities and required money (wages) to buy them. The two means of realising subsistence could, however, occur simultaneously, meaning employers could pay native labourers below the costs of their production and reproduction. It also meant native labourers could be hired for short periods of time, an important factor

in many resource extraction industries like fishing. The capitalist state also played an important role, in alienating control over land and resources, and in partially maintaining the native population when it could no longer sustain itself.

Social and Collective Division of Labour

Social division of labour characterises all human societies. In most, gender is used as a way of assigning different sets of tasks to men and women, centred around biological reproduction. Physiological differences are reinterpreted to enforce social and cultural differences, dividing tasks necessary to human survival such that tasks themselves become typed as masculine and feminine. As long as little surplus is created, tasks may be gender typed without resulting in one gender being exploited by the other.

As Engels saw, the power of men to exploit women systematically springs from the existence of surplus wealth, and more directly from the state, social stratification, and the control of property by men. With the rise of the state, because of their monopoly over weapons and because freedom from child care allows them to enter specialized economic and political roles, some men - especially ruling-class men - acquire power over other men and over women. Almost all men acquire it over women of their own or lower classes, especially within their own kinship groups. These kinds of male power are shadowy among hunters (Gough, 1975: 70).

Structured gender inequality stems from the social division of labour, but emerges historically only when surplus is regularly produced, and with the development of a class of non-producers which, with the help of the state, appropriates that surplus. In the countries covered by this case study, in the nineteenth century, gendered inequality, along with classes and state structures, existed in western

Europe as well as in China and Japan, although particular household configurations differed within each country. Prior to the extension of colonial rule to North America, the native economies along the Pacific northwest coast possessed neither classes nor a state or states. However, the further north one travelled, the more stratified were social relations. As explained in Chapter 4, the Tlingit had a very stratified society, including slaves, and it is possible that a class structure was nascent. However, there was no regular pattern of exploitation comparable to western European, Chinese or Japanese society. Most likely, there was a mix of both cooperative and exploitive conditions, and the position of women probably reflected both aspects of social reality. It probably also varied according to the economic conditions pertinent to each tribe. The important point for this thesis is that structured gender inequality cannot be assumed. It is difficult to reconstruct a picture of the social relations pertinent to the various peoples living on the northwest coast, because anthropological work among them began long after colonial rule had altered social, economic and political relations among the very people studied, a point Leacock returns to constantly in her work.

Whether or not egalitarian conditions are a feature of the social division of labour, it is characterised by the producer controlling the making of her/his products. That is, the producer is responsible for all the operations involved in making particular articles, although a number of producers might share specific parts of the process. Here lies the crucial distinction between the social and the collective division of labour. Industrial capitalist production is marked by the

separation of producers from their products. The capitalist employer takes control over how products are made. His concern is to employ the means of production (all the inputs necessary to produce commodities, including labour) as cheaply as possible and to increase the margin between input costs and sale of commodities. The two types of division of labour become amalgamated, but

the division of labour in production develops at the expense of the social division of labour. At the same time, production in particular labour processes is broken down into its constituent elements, each becoming a separate production process; in this manner the social division of labour develops at the expense of the division of labour in production. But the forces of production developed by capital increase at such a pace that both divisions of labour expand, continually demarcating and revising the lines drawn between them (Mohun, 1983: 132).

It is significant that the products considered to be "women's work" in England were the first to be reorganised in factories. As Marx illustrates throughout the first volume of Capital, women and children formed the bulk of the labour forces employed at the start of the industrial revolution. Tasks were broken down into component parts requiring little skill or physical strength. At the same time, control of the labour process itself was taken from the labourer and assumed by the employer or manager. The individual craft worker was replaced by the collective worker; that is, the making of a commodity now involved a large number of labourers, each performing a minute and distinct part of the whole process. As Braverman has documented, gradually only the capitalist employer, and his top managers, knew what was required to make the entire product. Not only the means of production, but also the forces of production (especially knowledge), were appropriated from producers.

As industrial production expanded, the products traditionally made by men were also appropriated and reorganised within factories. Here the concept of skill becomes important. Male craft workers tried to retain control over both their products and their labour power by controlling the knowledge necessary to production. They were better placed than women or children because they had developed organisations or guilds in feudal times to control the entry of workers into specific trades and to restrict the knowledge needed to practise a particular trade to guild members (Dobb, 1978: 116-117). Men came to control specific crafts by employing legal sanctions to control entry and membership. Crafts falling under the designation of "women's work" were not protected in this manner, not because they did not involve special knowledge, but because women did not have access to legal protection and restriction, and because they were excluded from the developing market exchange networks. For example, in the transition to factory employment, cottage industries increasingly came under the control of middlemen contractors, who supplied cottagers with necessary supplies and collected the finished article. Their profit was realised by the difference between the costs they incurred in supplying cottagers and the sale of the finished articles. Dobb notes that sometimes cottagers were able to assume this middleman function. These were men who initially disposed of their own labour as well as that of their wives and children. "The important influence in determining the degree to which the domestic producers became dependent was probably the producer's own economic status rather than the proximity or distance of the sources of raw material supplies. And here it is probably true to

say that it was the possession of land that was the basis of such independence as the domestic craftsman in this first period of capitalist production retained" (Dobb, 1978: 149-150). Possession of land was in turn a factor determined by the ability of former peasants to acquire control over land and make a success of capitalist agriculture, becoming yeoman farmers. Both in feudal and capitalist agriculture, however, men (with rare exceptions) controlled agricultural production, as well as title to the land.

Marx ignores this social determination of what work is judged to require skill. In fact, he leaves skill out of his discussion of labour power, concentrating on its quantitative expression, as socially necessary labour time. Skill for him simply means that the costs of producing and reproducing labour power increase, since skill involves extra training and education (Marx, 1967: 172). Braverman picks up this discussion by illustrating how capitalist control over the forces of production gradually allow capitalists to define skill requirements, and he demonstrates how they embody skill in machinery (dead labour) and transform actual labour into activity supplementary to machine production. "From the moment that the tool proper is taken from the man, and fitted into a mechanism, a machine takes the place of a mere implement" (Marx, 1967: 374). "This initial step, removing the tool from the hands of the worker and fitting it into a mechanism, is for Marx the starting point of that evolution which begins with simple machinery and continues to the automatic system of machinery" (Braverman, 1974: 186).

There are two stages in industrial production: machinofacture and modern industry. "In manufacture, the revolution in the mode of production begins with labour-power, in modern industry it begins with the instruments of labour" (Marx, 1967: 371). The proletarianisation of women and children took place in the first stage. For reasons already given, their labour power came cheap. However, proletarianisation also involves men, although acquiring control over their labour power proved more difficult. The proletarianisation of male craft workers involved acquiring control over the knowledge and tools necessary for the practice of their crafts. This marked the second stage of industrial production, when knowledge was removed from the activity of labourers and incorporated in the products of their labour, in machinery. Along with displacement of knowledge, male craft workers were substituted by women and children when labour involved simple machine tending. Craftsmen retained control, developing trade union organisations to collectively protect their labour from further erosion, in those industries requiring their skill and knowledge. Class struggle can here be seen as a three-pronged battle, between capitalist and craftsman, and between craftsman and his wife and children, and between capitalist and cheap labour. Marx argues convincingly that where abundant cheap labour is available, there is little incentive to mechanise production.

Before the labour of women and of children under 10 years of age was forbidden in mines, capitalists considered the employment of naked women and girls, often in company with men, so far sanctioned by their moral code, and especially by their ledgers, that it was only after the passing of the Act that they had recourse to machinery. The Yankees have invented a stone-breaking machine. The English do not make use of it, because the 'wretch' who does this work gets paid for such a small portion of his labour, that machinery would increase the cost of production to the

capitalist. In England women are still occasionally used instead of horses for hauling canal boats, because the labour required to produce horses and machines is an accurately known quantity, while that required to maintain the women of the surplus-population is below all calculation. Hence nowhere do we find a more shameful squandering of human labour-power for the most despicable purposes than in England, the land of machinery (Marx, 1967: 394-395).

There is a clue here as to the link between the male working class (with dependents) and the "surplus-population" or reserve army of labour. When male workers lose the struggle over "family wages," and when they lose control over craft knowledge through mechanisation of their craft work, then male craft workers sink to the same position as their wives and children. But the structure of inequality dictates in this instance that those women and children will be hired in preference to men (except where legislation forbids their employment). Thus poverty means that there are either no jobs or that the jobs available pay wages below the costs necessary for the production and reproduction of even individual labour power. Since those costs are included in the negotiations between organised male workers and capitalist employers, and since they include unvalued work done in the household, it is impossible to set a figure for the costs of producing and reproducing the labour power of women and children when they enter paid labour. Hence the conditions described by Marx in the passage cited.

Marx was not unaware of the contradictions involved, although he did not analyse them beyond the argument outlined in the following passage.

The value of labour-power was determined, not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult labourer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family on to the labour-market, spreads the value of the man's labour-power over his whole family.

It thus depreciates his labour-power. To purchase the labour-power of a family of four workers may, perhaps, cost more than it formerly did to purchase the labour-power of the head of the family, but, in return, four days' labour takes the place of one, and their price falls in proportion to the excess of the surplus-labour of four over the surplus-labour of one. In order that the family may live, four people must now, not only labour, but expend surplus-labour for the capitalist. Thus we see, that machinery, while augmenting the human material that forms the principal object of capital's exploiting power, at the same time raises the degrees of exploitation (Marx, 1967: 395).

Rather than developing his argument in the direction outlined here, Marx in the next paragraph notes instead that now the workman sells his wife and children. Instead of meeting with the capitalist as an independent owner of a commodity, "the one possessing money and means of production, the other labour-power," the labourer now "has become a slave-dealer" (ibid.: 396). As noted previously, the solution for Marx does not involve ending inequalitarian relations between proletarian men and their wives and children, but resides instead in the male working class taking control over the means of production. As many feminist critics have pointed out, such a resolution to class struggle may perhaps end capitalist exploitation, but not necessarily the exploitation of one gender by the other.

Up to this point, the discussion has been limited to the internal dynamics of working-class struggle, in an attempt to demonstrate the two processes historically involved in structuring two types of labour power available for capitalist exploitation. But capitalist exploitation has its own dynamic which needs to be included in the analysis. The key concept here is the creation of surplus value.

The Concepts of Surplus Labour and Surplus Value

Industrial capitalists employ means of production and the commodity labour power to produce commodities sold in the market. The sale of commodities realises a value higher than the costs involved in their production. The key to Marx's labour theory of value is that the extra value realised by capitalists (which Marx calls surplus value) can only be created by the expenditure of living labour power, or the transformation of constant capital (including dead labour embodied in machinery) by variable capital. While constant capital simply transfers value to the commodity, only variable capital can add value to it: "that part of capital, represented by labour-power, does, in the process of production, undergo an alteration of value. It both reproduces the equivalent of its own value, and also produces an excess, a surplus-value, which may itself vary, may be more or less according to circumstances" (Marx, 1967: 209).

The paradox lies in the fact that, although labour power as a commodity realises its full value in the market place, yet it produces extra value for the capitalist, over and above its price. Part of the resolution in the contradiction lies in the time lags involved: between the time when the rate of wages is set and labour power actually hired, between the time labour power is expended and wages for it are paid (wages are paid after labour power is expended and both occur after contracts for wages are negotiated) and, most important, prices for commodities are set after they are produced. Capitalists can only realise surplus value (or profit) by making use of all these time lags; for example, by making labour more productive between the time wages are

established and commodities sold. Clearly, the impersonal market forces constantly act to eradicate the possibility of surplus, and capitalists employ a variety of means to keep that from happening. In order to accomplish that end, they must constantly make labour more productive, expand the scope of industrial production (for example, by industrialising new sectors of the economy), limit competition which forces prices downwards (resulting in the evolution of advanced monopoly capitalism), and a variety of other methods. Unlike previous modes of production, the capitalist economy can never remain static, it must expand or die. Its ability to expand is determined in turn by a variety of economic and class forces. Periodic crises occur. Marx predicted that at a certain stage in its development, capitalism would reach a crisis point, and, with the help of a class conscious proletariat, would self destruct. Crisis theories (using, for example, the concepts of organic composition of capital and capital accumulation; falling rate of profit; and under-consumption) try to explain why capitalism continues to be such a flexible system (why it hasn't self-destructed already) and try to assess the nature and importance of the various economic crises that have occurred and are occurring. While the theories focus on the role of capital, they do study, although in a very limited way, the role of labour in helping precipitate economic crises and in resolving them.

As mentioned, the creation of surplus value is made possible by paying the commodity labour power for only a portion of the labour actually expended in production. Although the commodity labour power realises its full price on the labour market, unpaid labour is secured, and this unpaid labour Marx calls surplus value (ibid.: 534). As

discussed in a previous section, surplus value originates from the difference between labour power and its transformation into actual labour activity. To explain how surplus value is created, Marx divides the time labour is employed into necessary and surplus labour time; that is, the labourer works beyond the time necessary to produce and reproduce labour power. In previous modes of production, non-producers appropriated surplus labour directly. Producers were aware which part of their labour belonged to them and which part was taken from them (for example, peasants had to work specified periods of time for the lord, or had to give up fixed amounts of their produce). Marx calls this the creation of absolute surplus value. The difference in capitalist industrial production is that another method of extracting surplus value is developed. Labour itself, not simply the length of its employment, is made more productive.

In the first stage, machinofacture, employers simply extended hours worked without paying proportionately higher wages, thus extracting absolute surplus value from labour. But there are physiological limits to this type of exploitation. As long as there is a large surplus population, there are pressures to keep wages down and reinforcements are available when current labour is exhausted. Ultimately, however, employers using labour in this way will kill the sources for surplus creation.

A far more effective method, marking the transition to mature capitalism, is to make labour itself more productive, by allowing individual units of labour power to create more commodities in a given amount of time. And labour is made more productive by increasing the

aids necessary to labour in production, that is, through machinery (itself a commodity).² With the aid of machines, less labour time is needed to create the same number of commodities, or, conversely, more commodities can be created in the same amount of time. Therefore, the time necessary for labour power to meet its own needs, necessary labour time, shrinks, while surplus labour time expands. At this point, absolute and relative surplus value become indistinguishable, because the working day is not shortened in proportion as labour is made more productive. "Relative surplus-value is absolute, since it compels the absolute prolongation of the working-day beyond the labour-time necessary to the existence of the labourer himself. Absolute surplus-value is relative, since it makes necessary such a development of the productiveness of labour, as will allow of the necessary labour-time being confined to a portion of the working-day" (Marx, 1967: 511).

At the same time, because more commodities can be produced with the expenditure of less labour power, costs of production will fall (once the increased costs of constant capital in the form of new machinery, for example, have been absorbed). If the employer is the sole producer of these commodities, prices may remain at their old levels. More likely, however, competition will force prices to reflect lower costs of production. When the commodities themselves are part of the goods workers must buy to realise subsistence, falling prices will further cheapen the price of labour power, since the same amount of consumer goods can now be purchased with lower wages. But if the price of commodities falls, then so does the profit realised by the capitalist. To realise the same profit, the capitalist must produce more goods,

which may lead to a crisis of overproduction, which may lower prices further. In such a crisis consumption cannot keep up with production, the basis for theories of underconsumption. Theories based on the falling rate of profit analyse the problem of falling prices, and, therefore, the need to create more surplus, in turn linked to the need to exploit labour even more (for example, by making it more productive than formerly, which will in turn eventually result in another crisis, this time at a higher level of labour productivity). These theories tend to analyse the place of labour in the contradictions between exploited labour (necessary to create surplus and thus realise a profit) and the consumption needs of labourers; in other words, labourers buy back the products they make and, in order for capitalists to realise a profit, labourers must be simultaneously exploited and must be able to consume commodities at prices above production costs. There is a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the capitalist mode of production, and it is this contradiction that crisis theories explore.

While Marx did see the underconsumption of the masses as a chronic state in capitalist society, it only became a factor in crisis given the dynamics of accumulation and the problem of the rising organic composition of capital. Engels states this position very clearly: "The underconsumption of the masses, the restriction of the consumption of the masses to what is necessary for their maintenance and reproduction, is not a new phenomenon. It has existed as long as there have been exploiting and exploited classes...The underconsumption of the masses is a necessary condition of all forms of society based on exploitation, consequently also of the capitalist form; but it is the capitalist form of production which first gives rise to crises. The underconsumption of the masses is therefore also a prerequisite condition for crises, and plays in them a role which has long been recognized. But it tells us just as little why crises exist today as why they did not exist before" (Wright, 1979: 138-139).

The role of the working class in precipitating crises stems from the development of relative surplus value. As labour is made more productive, less labour power is needed to create the same number of commodities; in other words, dead labour displaces living labour. But dead labour cannot realise surplus value. Less variable capital is needed, which means fewer labourers need be hired. But just as dead labour does not produce surplus value, neither does it consume the commodities made. Rising productivity can result in both a fall in wages and/or a shrinking employed labour force (thus swelling the ranks of the surplus population). Various mechanisms determine which course will actually happen, but the overall effect can be one of underconsumption or overproduction, thus limiting capital accumulation and realisation of profit.

Whether or not such analyses provide answers to Engels' question as to why crises occur cannot be gone into here. But an important point can nevertheless be made about the role of the working class in such theories. Most, if not all, posit a pure capitalist mode of production. Even when acknowledgement is made that the production and reproduction of labour power is affected by factors like unpaid work in the home and the existence and exploitation of pre-capitalist relations of production, attention is then focussed on the ability of labourers to buy commodities, thus allowing capitalists to realise both their costs of production and a profit. When demand of labourers for these products falls, then the potential for an economic crisis ensues. If capitalism was the only mode of production in existence globally, then the role of the working class in precipitating economic crises through its inability

to consume the products of its labour would certainly escalate. One shock absorbent for economic crises is surely the ability of labourers to retreat into relations of production outside capitalism, and their ability to ride out economic storms.

In a pure capitalist mode of production, it is possible to quantify labour. However, it is not so easy to quantify work, since it is distinguished from labour precisely in that it has no exchange value, and is therefore quantifiable only to the extent that labour and work can be compared (for example, by trying to set a price on housework by estimating costs if all the tasks done in the household were instead performed in the market place). This also assumes that labour power is itself uniformly priced, and this leads to circular arguments. For example, many tasks taken out of the home and performed for exchange value receive lower rates of pay because they are also done in the home, by women, whose labour in the home has no value (for example, paid domestic labour is done at a price often far below even minimum wages). The fact of two labour processes helps to clarify this problem. While the labour power of the organised male working class is quantifiable, the labour power of the rest of the working class is determined by non-quantified factors; that is, the quality of work and its ability to reduce costs of production/reproduction. In addition, the two types of labour power then meet and further redefine wages. Male workers are threatened by the lower prices attached to other types of labour power, while cheap labourers try to gain higher wages by comparing their labour and skills to those of higher-priced labourers. Insofar as they try to quantify labour power without taking these important distinctions into

their calculations, crisis theorists miss an important dynamic in the ability of capitalists to exploit labour. For example, almost all hold the rate of exploitation constant.

The law of value will tend to ensure that the value produced by workers across different industries will be the same, and competition in the labour market will tend to ensure a uniform value of labour power at least for unskilled labour. Thus we can talk about a common rate of surplus value across an economy, where the rate of surplus value (sometimes called the rate of exploitation) is defined as the ratio:

$$s/v = \frac{\text{amount of surplus produced}}{\text{variable capital laid out}}$$

If skilled labour is seen as a multiple of unskilled, producing value proportionate to the extra pay received, the rate of surplus value will be constant across skilled labour too (Himmelweit, 1983: 473-474).

In this kind of analysis, qualitative distinctions are lost. And, more important, skilled labour becomes at best a different expression of unskilled labour (and thus comparable in quantified terms). The rate of exploitation is held constant, but the whole dynamic of capitalism involves constant change. To the extent, then, that these theories overlook such important differences between qualitative and quantitative distinctions, they can be accused of being economistic, of remaining static descriptions of an imagined pure capitalist mode of production that misses the dynamics of historical processes and the contradictions between capitalist and non-capitalist relations of production.

Although Shaikh criticises crisis theories, he seems to adopt the economists' fascination with measurable variables. He too seems to posit a pure capitalist mode of production.

The time workers actually put in (L) is determined by the length of the working day. The time necessary to reproduce themselves (V), on the other hand, is determined by both the amount of goods they consume (their "real wage") and the labor-time it takes to produce these goods. The mass of surplus value (S) and

the rate of exploitation (S/V) can therefore be increased in two ways: directly, by lengthening the working day L so that surplus labor time is directly increased; and indirectly, by lowering the necessary labor-time V so that more of a given working day is spent in surplus labor-time. This latter method of increasing S and S/V requires that either workers' real wages be reduced or that the productivity of their labor be raised so that it takes them less time to produce their means of consumption, or both (Shaikh, 1978: 232).

While in his critique of various types of crisis theory, Shaikh acknowledges the importance of pre-capitalist relations of production, when he turns to economic formulations, V (time necessary for workers to reproduce themselves) is determined by "real wages" and the labour-time necessary to produce them. There is no room in such calculations, or so it seems, for unpaid work performed outside the workplace but contributing to V by lowering costs of production and reproduction of labour power. Perhaps the argument would be put forward that the minimum wage, itself a product of state intervention in the economy, represents the price of unskilled labour power at any given point in time. While such a calculation may prove useful, it does ignore two issues. First, much paid labour occurs outside the official marketplace; for example, the huge profits made in drug trafficking occur precisely because the sale of these commodities is illegal (Illich, 1982). Second, within the official economy (that is, those items included in the calculation of Gross National Product), labour power may be paid a minimum wage, but employers find other means of cheapening that labour power even further. The example that springs to mind here is the current movement by Canadian department store chains to turn all of their permanent full-time sales staff into part-time workers. This allows employers flexibility in hiring staff only when

needed, and not being obliged to pay into employee benefit programs required by state legislation. In other words, the dynamic of how labour power is actually employed is left out of discussions that focus on econometric models alone. It is not that such models are not useful, but there is a danger of relying on them alone, since they have the advantage of neatly quantifying social reality. What is missed from that social reality is equally important.

The qualitative differences between the two labour processes can be used to uncover the historical developments whereby capitalists separate skilled craft labour from cheap labour power. For example, the B.C. fishing industry was prosecuted by capitalists because a market for canned salmon developed alongside the creation of a British proletariat, separated from its means of subsistence, and reliant on new food sources.³ Clearly, British labourers could not afford to pay high prices for tinned salmon. And clearly, if salmon canners were to pay their labour forces the same rates as those paid British labourers, there would be no way to make a profit (especially taking into calculation the high costs of transporting a heavy, bulky article to another part of the world). It was precisely because canners found other sources of labour power (other than European labourers immigrating to Canada in the hope of obtaining even higher wages than those in their home country) that they could make salmon canning a profitable venture.

Chinese and native canning crews could not afford to buy back the commodities they produced, but that was not the intention of canners in engaging in the industry. The market lay elsewhere, and the concern of B.C. salmon canners, as with all capitalists, was to create as large a

margin as possible between the sale of the commodity and its costs of production. The argument being made here is that such dynamics must be included in evaluating the role of the working class in economic crises. To the extent that work proceeds outside the industrial workplace and contributes to survival, labourers can be not only hired more cheaply but they can also buttress the effects of economic crisis much better than if they were totally reliant on wages and commodities bought with those wages. Returning to the example of the B.C. salmon canning industry, canners often allowed native cannery crews to take those species of salmon inadvertently captured but not usable in canning.⁴ Such fish had no exchange value to the canners but it had use value as a source of sustenance to their labour forces. While the British proletariat exchanged wages for canned salmon, native peoples continued to rely on their ability to acquire the natural resource for free (that is, outside capitalist relations of exploitation).

Of course, the discussion here cannot explain how crises in consumption are resolved in the production of consumer commodities by skilled craft labour. Clearly, cheaply paid labourers cannot afford such commodities, unless precapitalist relations of production allow them to take care of the majority of their needs through unpaid work, allowing them to spend the wages they do earn on these commodities (this rarely happens).⁵ The movement described here goes in only one direction, production of commodities using cheap labour power for consumption by highly paid labourers, most of them residing in North America and western Europe. Many basic consumer industries (for example, textiles and food processing) involve cheaply paid labourers

(the industrial revolution began precisely in this manner). Consumer markets therefore take into consideration that there are differently priced labour forces, those who can afford certain commodities and those who cannot, but who are employed in making them. Some commodities, of course, can be produced so cheaply that all labourers can afford them. Many of these are indispensable for subsistence (one reason why agricultural productivity had to be raised before the industrial revolution could begin). The only point being stressed here is that there are dynamics at work within the working class important to crisis theories. Another important factor to be considered in the ability of capitalist economies to pull themselves out of economic crises, as both Wright and Shaikh point out, is the increasing involvement of the state in advanced capitalism.

The Role of the State in Structuring Unequally Paid Labour Forces

The existence of two different wage labour forces is not part of the logic of capitalism. If a pure capitalist mode of production existed, then labour power would find its value in the wages determined by market forces. The existence of pre-capitalist relations of production introduced historically another factor in the valuation of labour power, the differential value of the labour process of different groups through fixed criteria like gender and race. In turn, frictions developed within the working class, as groups fought not to have their labour power devalued. The arena where such battles were fought was the state. Economic inequality within the working class requires state intervention precisely because the inequality is not a product of

economic capitalist forces but rather the use by capitalists of non-economic valuations in structuring labour forces.

Marx intended to devote one volume of Capital to a discussion of the state, but never managed to undertake the task. Engels, in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, connected the historical emergence of classes with the need for a structure to enforce and legitimate appropriation of surplus by non-producers. And "the world historical defeat of the female sex" was in turn a product of the emergence of classes and a state (Engels, 1981: 120).

The most recent Marxian work on the role of the state in capitalism stems from the publications of Miliband and Poulantzas, and the ensuing debate.⁶ The debate revolves around the question of how a political institution can play a role in economic class relations, and, perhaps even more important, whether the working class can effect radical social, economic and political changes by using the state (a view which assumes the state to be neutral, the "state in capitalist society") or whether the state acts in the interests of the dominant class and neutralises working class struggle by channelling it into political rather than economic arenas ("capitalist state") (Wright, 1979: 195). Miliband's original study was labelled instrumentalist and Poulantzas' structuralist, but more recent work has demonstrated the complementarity of the two approaches, as well as the differences.

Two different approaches have, in recent years, been used.. The first relies on a number of ideological and political factors: for instance, the pressures which economically dominant classes are able to exercise upon the state and in society; and the ideological congruence between these classes and those who hold power in the state. The second approach emphasizes the 'structural constraints' to which the state is subject in a capitalist society, and the fact

that, irrespective of the ideological and political dispositions of those who are in charge of the state, its policies must ensure the accumulation and reproduction of capital. In the first approach, the state is the state of the capitalists; in the second, it is the state of capital. However, the two approaches are not exclusive but complementary (Miliband, 1983: 465).

The point of agreement between the two theories, and the place from which most recent work begins, is the acknowledgement of the increased and increasing role of the state in advanced monopoly capitalism. In the case study undertaken here, the point has been made that political institutions are important in enforcing and structuring socially determined relations of inequality. Engels makes this point; for example, by demonstrating how the Roman state, through the formulation and enforcement of laws surrounding marriage and wills, elevated the patriarchal family form to a dominant position.

Its essential features [the patriarchal family] are the incorporation of unfree persons and paternal power; hence the perfect type of this form of family is the Roman. The original meaning of the word "family" (familia) is not that compound of sentimentality and domestic strife which forms the ideal of the present-day philistine; among the Romans it did not at first even refer to the married pair and their children but only to the slaves. Famulus means domestic slave, and familia is the total number of slaves belonging to one man. As late as the time of Gaius, the familia, id est patrimonium (family, that is, the patrimony, the inheritance) was bequeathed by will. The term was invented by the Romans to denote a new social organism whose head ruled over wife and children and a number of slaves, and was invested under Roman paternal power with rights of life and death over them all (Engels, 1981: 121).

Thus, while economic relations become relations of inequality with the historical evolution of classes in various modes of production, political relations serve to legitimate the particular form of economic exploitation practised by the ruling class and provide an ideology, a system of beliefs, to justify exploitation. But the system of beliefs,

particularly in non-capitalist modes of production, is not reflective only of economic relations. Non-economic forms of exploitation, like the patriarchal family, justify economic exploitation. The capitalist mode of production raises economic exploitation to new heights, and economic relations come to predominate over others, and to determine them more visibly. While the liberal democratic state reflects the new forms of exploitation, older forms, like patriarchy, do not simply disappear. They continue until eliminated by organised struggle and resistance by exploited groups, exploited both politically and economically.

Of particular importance to the present study are the struggles focussed on granting political rights to groups excluded from political participation: women, native peoples, Chinese, Japanese and East Indian residents of Canada. Political exclusion enabled capitalist employers to treat the labour power of these groups in special ways. Because they could not call on legal sanctions, these groups could be exploited as cheap labour in a way that political citizens could not be. The various groups did eventually win political recognition, not without many decades of struggle. However, political "personhood" threatened the ability of capitalist employers to exploit them as cheap wage labour. It was precisely at this point in time, after the end of the second world war, that the state began to play a direct role in the production and reproduction of labour power. That is, both employers and organised labourers called on the state to fill the gap between wages and the ability of labourers to produce and reproduce their labour power. The details of these various struggles as they affected B.C. shore plant

labour forces are given in Chapter 6. While it is outside the scope of this study to explore the theoretical debates on the role of the state, certain parts of the debate are useful in understanding the historic role of the provincial and federal states in the provincial fisheries. They will be summarised in the remainder of this section.

For the purposes of the present study, then, the state can be defined in part as a set of visible institutions controlled by a group working on behalf of the long-term interests of the ruling class or class fractions. Agency is attributed to the state because policies are made and enacted in its name. At the same time, because of the "relative autonomy" (a concept developed by Poulantzas) of the state (or the political) from the capitalist class or class fractions (the economic), class struggle takes place within the state, and dominated classes can exert pressure to partially realise their interests.⁷ However, the state remains wedded to the pursuance of capitalist class interests. Here, Poulantzas' analysis becomes important. For the state must be defined as more than a set of institutions. It is also a set of relations that evolve within the capitalist economy. A closer look at Poulantzas' work is necessary to elaborate this part of the definition.

According to Poulantzas, "a historically determined social formation is dependent on the coexistence of several modes of production. In this sense, the state of such a formation results from a combination of several types of state, the product of the different modes of production which come into combination in this formation" (Poulantzas, 1978: 144).

Because of the coexistence in a capitalist formation of several modes of production and of several forms of the CMP [capitalist mode of production] and because of the complex articulation of instances, each with its own time-sequence, the dominance in a capitalist formation of one form of the CMP over another is not expressed in a simple development (ibid.: 154).

In understanding the evolution of the provincial fisheries, and the participation of the various groups and classes in them, the importance of the state must be taken into consideration. Different states were involved as the provincial economy was transformed from a hunting and gathering mode of production, through the fur trade and colonial settlement eras, and the succeeding capitalist stages. The economy of the native peoples, where there was no state formation, was penetrated in the name of the British state and colonised. State formations changed as the area that became known as British Columbia was transformed from a colony to a province.

In turn, state formations reflect economic relations. For Poulantzas, three elements comprise the level of the economic: labourers, means of production, and the non-labourers who appropriate surplus labour. "These elements exist in a specific combination which constitutes the economic in a given mode of production, a combination which is itself composed of a double relation of these elements" (Poulantzas, 1978: 26). This double relation consists of "real appropriation" (that is, the relation of the labourer to the means of production) and a "relation of property" whereby the non-labourer intervenes as owner of the means of production, of labour power, or of both. This second relation in turn defines the "relations of production" (ibid.).

This theoretical conceptualisation of "property" as a point of entry between the non-labourer and the labourer through appropriation of the means of production (one point of entry) helps clarify the role of both the federal and provincial states in Canada.⁸ Initially, the British intervened in the native economy by claiming all land to be British crown property. Since the state is not a person, such a claim can only be understood as made on behalf of certain classes in Great Britain, initially those associated with the trading companies developing the fur trade. However, because the initial claim was put forward in the absence of a resident capitalist class, it determined the nature of capitalist development of the provincial economy, in the continued extraction of resources rather than secondary manufacturing.⁹ Resources were initially extracted to be processed in Britain, and this development continued when the provincial economy subsequently became dependent on central Canada and the United States. At the same time, the state has retained a dominant presence in Canadian capitalist development (Naylor, 1975). In the case of the provincial fisheries, after confederation in 1871, the Fisheries Act was extended to British Columbia. The federal state claimed the right to manage the fisheries in the "common interest."¹⁰ In actual practice, this meant the opening of the fisheries to capitalist exploitation and managing the resulting conflicts (especially those between canners and fishers) as well as trying to preserve the resources from total destruction (managing the long-term interests of those directly involved in the industries against the short-term interests of canners, many of whom demanded the right to unlimited capture as long as markets and profits were good).

Poulantzas argues that in the capitalist mode of production, the articulation of the economic and of the political occurs in relative autonomy, with the economic assuming a dominant role. The very existence of the state in the capitalist mode of production is an indication of unresolvable contradictions. According to Engels: "It is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself." (as quoted in Poulantzas, *ibid.*: 48) The role of the state is one of cohesion, or, using a metaphor borrowed from Gramsci, the state acts as a cement (*ibid.*: 207). Because the social formation is divisive, based as it is on the double relation noted, there arises the necessity of providing an ideological justification for exploitation, of unifying the various divisive forces at the political level, while allowing their continuation at the economic. This ideology is developed at the level of the political, within the state. As will be demonstrated, in British Columbia this ideology was initially based on racism. The state representing colonial settlement excluded non-white peoples from membership (native peoples, Chinese, Japanese and East Indians were all denied the franchise). The white settlement in British Columbia perceived itself as a cohesive group in terms of a perceived threat by these other peoples. Provincial politicians played an important leadership role in articulating racist feelings, and in enacting legislation to exclude non-white peoples from political participation and to bar them from entry into the province (Ward: 1978).

In order to comprehend how racism was used as an ideology "cementing" the white population of British Columbia, it is useful to develop Poulantzas' concept of class. Poulantzas argues this concept, like that of the state, cannot be understood as a concrete set of individuals ("agents") but, rather as a set of relations.

More exactly, social class is a concept which shows the effects of the ensemble of structures, of the matrix of a mode of production or of a social formation on the agents which constitute its supports: this concept reveals the effects of the global structure in the field of social relations. In this sense, if class is indeed a concept, it does not designate a reality which can be placed in the structures: it designates the effect of an ensemble of given structures, an ensemble which determines social relations as class relations (Poulantzas, 1978: 67-68).

Further, a particular social formation "consists of an overlapping of several modes of production, one of which holds the dominant role, and it therefore presents more classes than the 'pure' mode of production" (ibid.: 71). To understand the role of classes or groups that survive from pre-capitalist modes of production, Poulantzas introduces the concept of "pertinent effects." These can only be understood in terms of specific historical situations. In turn, the presence of a "class" is expressed at the political level through "pertinent effects."

These structures, having their effects on the ensemble of the field of class struggle, often prevent the independent political and ideological organization of the classes of non-dominant modes of production, and result precisely in the polarization of these classes around classes of the dominant mode. The 'pertinent effects,' however, permit the precise location of the threshold from which an under-determined class exists, and indeed functions, as a social force: the same holds for autonomous fractions of a class (ibid.: 82, emphasis in original).

This concept of "pertinent effects" can be applied in understanding the divisions within labouring groups in British Columbia, along racial lines. The antagonism of white labourers towards Chinese and Japanese labourers can be understood in terms of a differential class situation, a "pertinent effect." Chinese contractors, middlemen between employers and labourers, recruited cannery labour. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, these middlemen could provide cheap labour power because of pre-capitalist relations existing in China. On the other hand, European male workers acquired partial control over their means of production because these, in the form of natural resources, were controlled not by individual capitalists but by the state. This situation was a product of the colonial status of the province, a historical situation not defined within a "pure" mode of production. Thus, while European male workers maintained partial control over resources as fishers (although this control has always been mediated by the federal state), Chinese cannery workers suffered a double relation of exploitation (by cannery employers mediated through Chinese contractors). At the political level, this economic disjuncture between the situation of fishers and cannery workers (stemming from different relations to the means of production and to non-labourers) was channelled by way of an ideology of racism into alliances between classes. A partial alliance was secured between white fishers and canners, and both groups formed alliances based on their perceptions of the racial situation with the provincial state. The provincial state, in turn, articulated this racial ideology, and provided channels for expressing discontent by means of racial

accusations (rather than the far more dangerous ones rooted in capitalist economic exploitation).

The situation of native peoples provides yet another set of "pertinent effects." As demonstrated in Chapter 4, their economic base (means of production) was pre-empted by the British crown and then partially returned to them (in the form, for example, of aboriginal land claims, including fishery sites). Cannery workers were thereby enabled to recruit yet another cheap labour force; one, however, that was not easily subordinated. In terms of race relations, native peoples have developed a variety of alliances. At times they have allied themselves with employers, at times with white fishers, at times with Japanese fishers, but almost always against the provincial state which, after Douglas, has consistently refused to recognise the rights and claims granted them by Britain and taken over by the federal state (Fisher, 1980: 146-174). In addition, the situation of native fishers has differed from that of cannery workers, based on different relations, even within families, to the means of production. This has led to splits within the group and differential alliances to the other groups and classes mentioned.

It is not enough, however, to consider only the continuation of pre-capitalist relations within the capitalist mode of production. The particular capitalist stage of development of a particular social formation is also important. The structural situation described here belongs to the early capitalist development of the province. Although cannery workers owned the factories and machinery (although even here, once the technology had developed to a certain stage, canning lines could be

leased from machinery manufacturers), they did not own the resource (until it was caught and appropriated either directly by employing fishers as wage workers or indirectly by buying the fish from them, and here again the situation differed according to the race of the fisher) nor did they own the habitat. The employment of factory labour through contracts reflected this partial ownership, since it meant that canners were dependent on fishers for the supply and since they were forced to build their factories near the source of capture, often moving them or closing them during low production periods. The nature of the resource (the fact that salmon return in yearly and seasonal cycles) and the state of the forces of production (the absence of refrigeration techniques to preserve the fish, thus allowing for more control in where and when it is processed) were also important determining factors.

These different "pertinent effects" have also resulted in different forms of struggle. While native peoples have collectively struggled against the state (at the political level), white fishers have generally focussed their struggles around economic issues. And Chinese workers and Japanese fishers have used community organisations, with roots in pre-capitalist relations, in their struggles.

Poulantzas identifies three types of class practice - economic, political and ideological: "the concepts of power and domination, in their relation to the concept of class, by no means cover only the level of political structures, but also the ensemble of the field of social relations, i.e. economic, political and ideological class practices" (ibid.: 331, emphasis in original). In analysing class struggle, he concentrates on the economic and political levels (since the ideological

is, for him, encapsulated within the political)). Marx termed the levels of struggle "class-in-itself" (economic, or trade-union, struggle) and "class-for-itself" (political struggle) (ibid.: 74-75). For Poulantzas, as for Lenin, "the political struggle must always have priority over the economic struggle" (ibid.: 92, emphasis in original). The objective of political struggle is state power. However, according to Poulantzas' own argument, the capitalist mode of production is itself characterised by a series of contradictions in the social formation, requiring the state as cohesive force to contain it. Further, since neither the state nor classes are objects, it is difficult to understand how the objective of political struggle can be state power. Indeed, at the end of his work, he stresses that "the state is in fact only a power centre" (ibid.: 351). Presumably, then, to acquire power presupposes changes in the social formation at the level of the economy, since the state is necessary because of contradictions determined there. The complexity of this problem can be demonstrated by looking at the types of struggle that have taken place in the B.C. fishing industry.¹¹

White fishers have generally organised along trade union lines (Gladstone, 1959; Ralston, 1965). Native fishers have followed a more diverse path, using both political and economic organisations. Indeed, some native organisations (for example, the Native Brotherhood) have incorporated both economic and political objectives (Drucker, 1958). Both groups have influenced shoreworkers. However, just as the state influenced the relationship between labourers and non-labourers, it has also had a determining effect on labour organisation within the plants. Initially, as demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, it played a role in

securing plant labour through immigration policies allowing the entry of Chinese workers and refusing to interfere in the operations of Chinese contractors. State policies were also important in transforming the native economy, resulting in the partial release of native workers to labour in the canneries. While fishers engaged in a direct battle with canners, beginning at the turn of the century (Gladstone, 1959; Ralston, 1965), internal labour relations in canneries were marked by an absence of state regulation (Garrod, 1984). The situation changed dramatically during the second world war, when state involvement in the fisheries escalated, resulting in labour legislation, including recognition of a trade union, the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union (Muszynski, 1984). Union agreements displaced the Chinese contract system in payment of workers and determination of wage and working conditions (although Chinese contractors continued to recruit a portion of the labour force for some canneries).

In conclusion, in the B.C. fishing industry, political and economic relations have been closely intertwined. In order to examine these relations in greater detail, it is necessary at this point to turn to the case study itself. The following chapter presents a brief history of the industry, to situate the various events described in this chapter. The rest of the thesis then focusses on demonstrating the nature of the labour processes used, developed and transformed by salmon canners in their search for cheap wage labour; the process of state involvement in the industry; and organised struggle by fishers in the industry, resulting in the formation of an industrial trade union, as

well as the process by which shoreworkers began to fight within the union structure for their own interests.

¹ Mode of production can be defined as follows:

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers (and also that this) determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers - a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity - which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure (Capital III, ch. 47, sect. II). (Himmelweit, 1983: 336-337).

² In commodity production, Marx distinguished between two "departments:" Department 1 involved producer goods while Department 2 involved consumer goods. The two play different roles in the capital accumulation process, a fact that, according to Shaikh, Marxian underconsumption and disproportionality theories tend to overlook (1978: 226).

³ "The market for this article...depends intimately upon the condition of the manufacturing and mining classes in Great Britain and elsewhere, affording to them, as it does, in a convenient form, a very acceptable change from the uniformity of their ordinary diet" (DMF, 1880: 280).

⁴ "Of course, from accidental causes, some sacrifice of fish for mercantile purposes has occasionally happened; but, in such cases the cannery proprietors have usually presented the fish gratuitously to the natives around, who have cured the fish by drying for their own consumption" (DMF, 1879: 292).

⁵ The CBC news programme, The National, on May 12, 1986, presented a short clip on the expanding South Korean economy. It investigated the Hyundai automobile plant. Labourers are paid a fraction of the wages received by their North American counterparts, approximately \$3 per hour. They also work extremely long hours (possibly without overtime pay), 72 hours per week for a plant foreman. The point was made in the clip that they cannot afford to buy the cars they make. Clearly the consumer market is the more highly paid American and European labour force. But Korean competition undermines the American (and possibly European) automobile industries and their ability to keep operating, and, thus, ultimately the ability of North American labourers to buy cars. This case is useful because it illustrates clearly that there are

two types of labour forces employed in the same industry, one serving the other but undermining its very ability to consume the commodities produced more cheaply.

⁶ Poulantzas published Political Power and Social Classes in 1968, almost at the same time as Miliband's The State in Capitalist Society (1969). The two engaged in a debate over their different conceptualisations of the state. The debate is reprinted in R. Blackburn, Ideology and Social Studies (1972). The debate widened. See, for example, Amy Beth Bridges, "Nicos Poulantzas and the Marxist Theory of the State," in Politics and Society (1974); David A. Gold, Clarence Y.H. Lo and Erik Olin Wright, "Recent Developments in Marxist Theories of the Capitalist State," in Monthly Review (1975); Ernesto Laclau, "The specificity of the political: the Poulantzas-Miliband debate," in Economy and Society (1975); and Poulantzas' rejoinder, "The Capitalist State: A Reply to Miliband and Laclau," in New Left Review (1976). For a Canadian analysis and application of the debate, see the work edited by Leo Panitch, The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power (1977).

⁷ As the capitalist mode of production develops, the state takes on an increased role, partially in response to economic crises and contradictions, partially to contain and channel working-class discontent. State welfare policies (the welfare state in advanced capitalism) can be understood in this context. For an excellent analysis of the British welfare state, see Ian Gough, The Political Economy of the Welfare State (1979).

⁸ There have been a number of studies examining the concept of property as it applies to the fisheries. Are they to be understood as "common property," "state property," or "private property?" For one of the most recent analyses, see Marchak in Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish Processing Industries in British Columbia (in press).

⁹ Because fish is a highly perishable resource, its extraction requires onsite processing. It is significant that state involvement has largely been confined to the manner of capture of the resource and its protection. State legislation was notable by its absence in labour relations within the canneries. This point is developed later in the chapter.

¹⁰ "The very individualism of capitalism, the fact that all subjects are formally free and equal to pursue their own ends, requires a separate structure, the state, to represent their 'common interest'. What results are the separate institutions of the modern state, and their apparent autonomy from the relations of exploitation" (Gough, 1979: 40).

The Commissioner of Fisheries, in 1875, interpreted the 1868 Fisheries Act as follows: "The whole tenor of that statute is an authoritative denial of any other private claims to fishing privileges, either absolute or incidental, express or implied, in the public

navigable waters of the Dominion" (DMF, 1876: xxxvii). Further on the same page, the statement is made that

the fisheries are a public property which the Crown is now empowered by Act of Parliament to control temporarily, but not in any case to alienate. In exercising this authority the leading object of all concerned has been to preserve and improve these public fisheries. The next aim has been to promote the interests of practical fishermen, and to protect them in the just use of the fishing privileges secured to them by Common Law.

The first fishery officer for the province was appointed in 1876, Alex C. Anderson, who was also an Indian agent and a justice of the peace. He had also worked for the Hudson's Bay Company and had forty years of experience with native people (DIA, 1880: 130 and DMF, 1882: 204).

¹¹ Panitch (1981) also examines the complexity or interrelationship between economic and political struggle by examining the role of trade unions as participants within state relations (corporatism). Gough criticises Marxist theories of the state (including that of Poulantzas), partly because they pay little attention to the role of working-class struggle in "altering the parameters of state action" (1979: 157).

CHAPTER 3

The B.C. Canning Industry: Historical Backdrop

While historical events continuously inform both the theoretical work and case study findings, a short overview of the industry will help situate events discussed in greater detail and sometimes separated from other events that occurred at approximately the same time or depended on still others discussed elsewhere. For example, the recruitment of a native labour force is treated separately from that of Chinese and Japanese labourers, although the two came to be used simultaneously and in competition. The role of the state is discussed in a separate chapter, as is the formation of an industrial trade union. In reality, the various structures and organisations partially "determined" one another.

Pre-Industrial Fishery¹

Native peoples exploited the rich fisheries resources long before European colonisation.² They developed a number of techniques to catch and process the various species of fish (Drucker, 1963: 35-41). Preservation ensured a winter food supply.³ "The year 1793 marks the beginning of another era - that of the interest in the coastal trade

that was ultimately demonstrated by land-based companies" (ibid.: 31). "The salting of salmon was begun soon after 1800 by the Northwest Company, later the Hudson Bay Company..., which exercised a monopoly of the fishing...and by 1835 was shipping three to four thousand barrels of salt salmon each year to the Hawaiian Islands. These early trading companies depended very largely upon salmon for their food supply" (Rounsefell and Kelez, 1938: 701). Rounsefell is here describing early commercial development of the Fraser River. Demand for salmon in this processed state was insufficient, however, to allow the Hudson's Bay Company to market it commercially on an extensive scale.

Markets, Financing and Transportation 1871-1902

The introduction of a fully capitalist enterprise was dependent on further developments in processing techniques. "From Maine and New Brunswick the salmon canning industry made the big leap in 1864 to the eastern rim of the Pacific Ocean, and...salmon canneries spread in about twenty years from the southern limit of salmon habitat in the rivers that flow into San Francisco Bay to the northern limit in Alaska, leapfrogging in a frenzy of development from the Sacramento to the Columbia, from the Fraser to the Skeena, and finally into the rich salmon streams of Bristol Bay, Alaska" (Ralston, 1981: 299). A large market for canned red salmon developed in Great Britain, a result of the industrial revolution and a working class which could not grow its own food. "Who canned the first salmon on the Pacific coast is still controversial. George and William Hume, operating a cannery on the Sacramento River, usually are given credit for this achievement because

they were known to be canning in 1864, but British Columbians claim the Humes were preceded by at least four years by Captain Edward Stamp, the province's 'first industrialist'" (Pacific Fisherman, 1952: 16).⁴ The United States industry soon dominated (Ralston, 1981: 300). Entrepreneurs in British Columbia followed the American pattern. They were forced to can a species similar in colour, texture and taste to the red kings, if they wanted to sell in the same market. After initially experimenting with red springs, B.C. canners used sockeye salmon. Eventually, other processing techniques were adopted. Other species of salmon, and other types of fish, notably halibut and herring, were marketed. But the capital originally employed in salmon canning enabled those entrepreneurs to gain a significant degree of control over the entire provincial fishing industry.

Capitalist penetration of the B.C. fisheries reflected a wider movement of capital into new industries. Several developments in the world economy were important for the timing of this particular encroachment. In the 1880s and 1890s, capital in the United States was reorganised into corporations. These developed around a new marketing approach. Transportation and food industries were the first arenas for these giant corporations. Food and transportation were in turn linked to the growth of large urban centers, in which food could not be grown and thus had to be transported from food producing areas, often located thousands of kilometers from these cities. However, since food can be highly perishable, technological innovations were crucial.

In general, the industrialization of the food industry provided the indispensable basis of the type of urban life that was being created; and it was in the food industry that the marketing

structure of the corporation...became fully developed. The canning industry had come into being in the 1840s with the development of stamping and forming machinery for producing tin cans on a mass basis. The expansion of this industry to embrace national and international markets did not come, however, until the 1870s, when further technical developments, including rotary pressure cookers and automatic soldering of cans - not to speak of the development of rail and sea transport - made it possible (Braverman, 1974: 262).

British Columbia consented to join Confederation, in 1871, on condition that the federal government construct a rail system joining the two seaboards within ten years. That same year, the Department of Marine and Fisheries undertook the regulation of the B.C. fisheries. Observers reported that these were little developed. "In speaking of the fisheries of British Columbia, one may almost be said to be speaking of something which has no existence. With the exception of a small attempt at putting up salmon in tins on the Fraser River, and one or two whaling enterprizes of a few years standing, no attempt whatever has been made to develope [sic] the actually marvellous resources of this Province in the way of fish" (DMF, 1872: 16). A little more than thirty years later, British Columbia was the top fish-producing province in Canada, with an estimated fish catch valued at \$9,850,216. Salmon was the most highly valued fish in the Dominion, at \$8,989,942, the great majority of it canned in British Columbia (DMF, 1906-7: xxi-xxii).

The B.C. salmon canning industry began independently of the earlier Sacramento and Columbia River canneries. Local commission merchants with direct trade connections to Great Britain provided financing. The Fraser River, the largest sockeye-producing stream in the province, was the first to be exploited.

Before the advent of the limited companies in the 1890s, the Fraser River's industrial organization was characterized by low levels of industrial concentration, small firms run by individuals or partners, and by a high incidence of local proprietorship...Long-run operating capital, which was especially important to the industry because the salmon market had an eighteen-month cycle from the time the tinplate was ordered until the season's pack was sold, was supplied by commission agents, who made advances in the form of overdrawn accounts on goods in transit. These agents provided canning and fishing supplies and a distribution system to the markets as well as capital (Stacey, 1982: 6).

By the mid-1880s, both the Columbia and Fraser Rivers experienced overexpansion, and canners began searching for salmon-producing streams in Alaska and northern British Columbia. At that time, the Fraser River canning industry consisted of thirteen firms, each tied to brokerage houses (Reid, 1981: 323). Victoria was the financial center of the province, and in the years between 1871 and 1891, salmon canning, sawmilling, and the north Pacific seal hunt replaced the fur trade and gold mining "as the leading staple industries in the Victoria-centered B.C. economy" (McDonald, 1981: 370-371). By 1881, salmon canneries and sawmills employed the largest labour forces; ten years later, 85 percent of provincial exports were products of the mines, fisheries or forests. Fraser River canned salmon was the fastest growing export industry. In the 20 year period ending in 1896, "the value of canned salmon exports shipped to external markets increased five times as fast as the value of forest product exports" (McDonald, 1981: 371-372).

Between 1876 and 1896, there was a change in the nature of financial control of the industry. T. Ellis Ladner, one of the pioneers, noted that cannery owners exercised less control than principal agent shareholders. The interests between the two differed.

Agents were not so much concerned with competition between canners as with financial control over the product and a commission appropriate to their investment. However,

the advent of eastern Canadian banks to British Columbia changed the situation for those canneries not already too involved in the old order. The more independent of the fiscal agent the cannery man was, the more he was able to control his own business. He could purchase materials at the lowest price and he could finance the introduction of modern plant methods and increase his profits through improved operations (Ladner, 1979: 92).

The movement of eastern Canadian banks into the province resulted in a shift of fiscal control from Victoria to outside the province. The banks tended to locate regional offices in Vancouver, close to the new transportation terminals. Subsequently, Victoria declined as the financial capital of British Columbia. The Bank of Montreal and the Canadian Bank of Commerce became the principal backers in the salmon canning industry. By 1901, this new financial capital source enabled companies to become independent from financial agents, through incorporation.

The shift in financial control was paralleled by a shift in transportation from the ocean to the rail. By the late 1880s, transcontinental lines were completed across Canada and the United States. However, American canners gained by the shift while Canadian canners found it difficult to shift to the new means of transportation. American freight rates were cheaper than Canadian. There was a much larger population in the eastern and southern states, and there markets became valuable to American canners, especially when it came to canning cheaper grades and species. B.C. canners could not compete since these markets were closed to them. "Prior to 1939, foreign markets, chiefly

Commonwealth, absorbed 65 per cent of the B.C. canned salmon production, leaving 35 per cent to be marketed on the Canadian domestic market" (Gladstone, 1959: 73).⁵ However, the growth of Vancouver as a railway terminus did stimulate other exports. Canned salmon failed to hold its dominant place, and was replaced by forestry products bound for prairie markets (McDonald, 1981: 383).

Corporate Control of Salmon Canning

The provincial salmon canning industry has been periodically marked by the formation of corporations intending to assume significant control over the industry. B.C. salmon canners have always had to contend with fairly weak domestic markets, a dependence on overseas markets in which the province never acquired a leading role, and sale of a product that is fairly uniform (one for which strong brand names have to be created in order to compete successfully).

The Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company (A.B.C.), incorporated in April 1891, in London, England, was the first attempt to control the industry. Henry Bell-Irving, the company's agent and chairman of its local committee, acquired options on nine canneries which he promptly sold to A.B.C. The "English syndicate," as the corporation came to be called, began with large amounts of its capital subscribed in Canada, although control resided in Great Britain. A boat licensing program was in effect during this period, on the Fraser River. By acquiring additional canneries, A.B.C. could pool boat licences, and reduce competition from both canners and fishers. Bell-Irving argued:

My company do [sic] not intend this year to work all its canneries because we cannot get enough boats to supply all the canneries with fish - it is proposed to run half the canneries on the Fraser River and use the fish from those boats of canneries not running to put in the other canneries and double up, thus reducing expenses, but I think it most essential that there should be a fixed number of licenses to the canners...so there should be no danger of being frozen out by an [sic] combination of fishermen, as canners have money invested and not the fishermen, and if it was not for the canners the fishermen would have a very small market indeed - the local market and which is a mere nothing to them (DMF, 1893: 330).

A.B.C. acquired two additional firms, and the company became "the largest producer of sockeye salmon in the world" (Ralston, 1965: 25). But this merger was part of a pattern. In 1889, the British Columbia Canning Company was incorporated in London. Its principals included the pioneers on the Fraser River: Findlay, Durham, and Brodie. They owned four canneries, three of them located in the north. Another pioneer, Alexander Ewen, also expanded, and, by 1889, he owned the largest cannery on the Fraser. In 1891, Victoria Canning Company of British Columbia, Limited Liability, was incorporated (*ibid.*: 26). J. H. Todd, a Victoria merchant and also an original entrant, remained outside these mergers. Thus, by the beginning of the 1891 season, five major groups were competing on the Fraser. A.B.C. bought out all the American-owned concerns, which represented 30 percent of total fixed capital by 1881 (Ralston, 1981: 300). Local entrepreneurs were involved in the formation of both British-backed companies. Together, A.B.C. and Victoria Canning Company controlled over 60 percent of the Fraser River's sockeye pack. Except for A.B.C., all the companies were financially linked to Victoria (Ralston, 1965: 19).

A major reason why these various groups bought and consolidated cannery operations was to buy boat licences to secure fish supplies. Attempts at oligopsonistic control stemmed from the overcrowded conditions on the Fraser. The number of fishers had risen dramatically, and, in the period 1872 to 1888, the number of canneries increased from three to twelve. Introduction by the federal state of licence limitation on the Fraser increased the pressure to consolidate. In 1889, 1890, and 1891, the number of licences was limited to 500, and each cannery was allotted an average of 20 licences (Stacey, 1982: 13). The program met with resistance by both canners and fishers, and, in 1892, was abolished.

Predictably, the end of licence limitation led to new entrants, both fishers and canners. Until the turn of the century, technological development was minimal, operations labour intensive and labour itself was cheap. Gregory and Barnes (1939: 30) described the situation throughout the Pacific northwest.

The greater number of canneries prior to 1893 was owned by single proprietors or partnerships...Except for the more elaborate ones they could readily be moved from one site to another to adjust to changing fishing conditions and competition. They were devoid of much machinery; their costs were low, and most of the early packing and handling prior to 1903 was done by hand...Often the canneries were enlargements of salteries that preceded them.

On both sides of the border, there was a trend towards a fish pack divided between a small number of large companies who dominated the industry, and a large number of small firms. While A.B.C. initially acquired some measure of power, within ten years the situation had come full circle. "By 1901 the level of concentration had reverted to its pre-merger position" (Reid, 1981: 320).

The new cycle of competition led to another bid for control. This time the pattern differed in that, with the availability of bank capital, canners could assume greater control over their operations. Victoria Canning Company, Alexander Ewen, and George Wilson, representing three of the large firms, joined forces together with Aemilius Jarvis and Henry Doyle. Jarvis held important ties with central Canadian financiers, stemming from 1892, when he established Aemilius Jarvis and Company, Investment Bankers. Doyle, on the other hand, through his connection with Doyle Fishing Supply Company of San Francisco, developed detailed knowledge of the salmon canning industry. And because he had conducted his business in the United States, he appeared to provincial canners to be an impartial partner, without interests in specific plants. In order to receive financing, the principals had to obtain control over 60 percent of the operating plants. Canners selling to British Columbia Packers were asked to commit themselves to not participating in the industry for at least seven years. J. H. Todd provides an interesting example. Henry Doyle gained his active support for the new merger. However, when most plants had been purchased, Todd pulled out of the agreement. With much of the competition eliminated, Todd could gain substantially from the new balance of power (Reid, 1981: 315-319).

Doyle had witnessed two similar mergers in the United States. In 1893, the Alaska Packers Association was formed, succeeding a merger the previous year, when 90 percent of the producers combined their operations. In 1899, another combine formed, the Columbia River Packers Association. In British Columbia, a heavy pack carryover occurred in

1901, resulting in many canners becoming indebted to the banks. The Bank of Montreal held half of the salmon canners' accounts while the Canadian Bank of Commerce held 40 percent (the remainder was held by Molson's Bank which, in 1942, was taken over by the Bank of Montreal). In 1902, the three banks approved the proposed amalgamation. Jarvis had already formed a syndicate and was acquiring subscriptions from central Canadian businessmen. The new company was formally chartered 8 April 1902 in New Jersey, and called The British Columbia Packers' Association of New Jersey (Lyons, 1969: 230-233).

In the United States, "institutional barriers" and lack of "widespread credit markets" hampered the centralisation of capital (Edwards, 1979: 42). Legal problems were overcome with New Jersey law and "strict interpretations of the Sherman Antitrust Act" (ibid.: 43). Then, between 1898 and 1902, there was a large merger wave which "drastically transformed the structure of large business in the United States" (ibid.). Within this wave can be situated the mergers in Alaska, on the Columbia River, and in British Columbia. The modern corporation had emerged. "The Victoria merchant community, traditional source of capital for the coast canning industry, was the principal casualty of the reorganization, with canneries previously controlled on Vancouver Island now owned by the larger corporation centred in Vancouver" (McDonald, 1981: 389). In the salmon canning industry, industrial capital displaced mercantile capital.

In the 1890s, new low-cost salmon producing areas emerged in Alaska and on Puget Sound in the United States. Puget Sound production intercepted runs headed for the Fraser. Reid (1981: 326) estimates

that, while in 1890, 97 percent of Fraser fish was canned on the river, by 1900 the proportion had fallen to below 40 percent. With lower Fraser River production, ownership of northern plants became very important. Sinclair notes "the northern canneries had shown historically much larger profits per case than those on the Fraser. Any company, therefore, wishing to control the Fraser River fishery would be financially stronger if it also possessed northern plants" (as quoted in Reid, 1973: ii).

Upon formation, B.C. Packers took possession of 29 of 48 canneries on the Fraser, and a further 12 in the north. By 1902, then, one-third of pre-existing canneries were closed while remaining plant capacity was doubled by concentrating machinery and equipment from idle plants. Up to this time, salmon canning had been organised on an assembly-line, manually-intensive basis. After the turn of the century, machines began to be introduced at various points on the assembly line. Mechanised lines, in turn, increased the amount of capital required to enter canning, and allowed the combination of several lines in one plant. The multiline cannery was superior to the single-line operation. Production did not have to stop when a change was made to a different-sized can, and surplus buildings in idled plants were ideal for storage. Stacey (1982: 10) estimates that, by 1905, 15 plants nearly equalled the capacity of the 29 purchased three years earlier on the Fraser.

In the twentieth century, the two largest and most dominant corporations were B.C. Packers and Canadian Fish Company (Canfisco). The latter was formed as a halibut fishery company, but, in 1909, was taken over by an American firm, New England Fish. In 1918, Canfisco

purchased a salmon cannery (Home plant) in Vancouver, and entered salmon canning. The companies became major rivals. In addition to these two, several medium-sized companies operated salmon canneries at strategic locations along the coast. Mention has been made of J. H. Todd & Sons Limited. Another strong contender was Nelson Brothers Fisheries Limited, incorporated in 1929. The two brothers who operated the company, however, had been in the industry since 1919, when they began trolling on the west coast of Vancouver Island. They purchased their first salmon cannery in 1933, St. Mungo on Fraser River, and subsequently purchased canneries in other locations. In 1940, they began operations in Prince Rupert. In 1943, they bought Port Edward, located near Prince Rupert, from B.C. Packers. In 1955, they closed St. Mungo and built Paramount plant in Steveston, on the Fraser (Lyons, 1975: 405, 459, 522). In the latter part of the 1950s, Canfisco and B.C. Packers jointly took over J. H. Todd & Sons. A decade later, they took over Nelson Brothers. Paramount is today part of Imperial plant, one of the two largest operations in the province, both owned by B.C. Packers. Oceanside plant in Prince Rupert was acquired from Canfisco, rebuilt and enlarged, and renamed Prince Rupert Plant. Until that acquisition, Port Edward was the major northern operation of B.C. Packers.

Although Canfisco appeared to be financially solvent, its parent, New England Fish, began to experience severe financial problems at the end of the 1970s. George Weston Ltd., a central Canadian food conglomerate, in 1962, acquired control over B.C. Packers. In 1980, Weston bought the majority of Canfisco's northern operations (UFAWU,

1984: 13). Thus, since 1980, B.C. Packers has acquired a dominant position in salmon canning, although other firms, like Canfisco, continue to operate. The Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op began to consider canning salmon in the early 1950s, and its plant in Prince Rupert is currently the major contender with B.C. Packers in the north.

In addition, there was in the 1970s increasing foreign investment, centred around the roe herring market. From the mid to the end of the 1970s, Japanese demand for the B.C. product escalated, opening both a new fishery and leading to an influx of Japanese capital. The investment has been mainly concentrated in the roe herring (and salmon), as well as in the fresh/frozen fish markets. It can be readily seen that the industry is complex, and complexly different at different points in time. The focus in the thesis is on the plant labour forces that developed from the salmon canning lines. Mention of the role of the co-ops and Japanese investment will be made in relation to the organisation of the labour forces (in Chapter 7). The important point to bear in mind in this connection, is the important role of the salmon canning companies in the provincial fishing industry. In large part, they have determined the nature of the labour process in both salmon canning and in other processing techniques. Until the turn of the century, salmon canning was the major form of capitalist production. After that time, the canneries were expanded to include other processing techniques, with large parts of the labour forces rotating from one to another, since new technologies and new fisheries could be alternated with salmon canning (for example, herring precede salmon and can stretch the length of employment available).

Before concluding the discussion of corporate formations and their attempts to dominate the industry, brief mention must be made of the importance of the two world wars to the industry. Both wars created unusual demands for canned B.C. salmon, as well as other fishery products (like canned herring and vitamin A extracted from the reduction of pilchard and herring). In turn, heavy market demand (as well as guaranteed packs in the second war, secured by the federal government and sold to the British) inflated prices. By the end of the first world war, a new cycle of competitors had eroded the dominant position of B.C. Packers.

The first world war cut the fish-supplying nations of northern Europe from their western European markets, and Canadian fisheries products filled the gap. In addition, as meat became scarce in war-torn countries, fish was substituted, further improving market demand. And, as Europeans consumed canned fish, North Americans turned to fresh and frozen salmon, halibut, and, to a lesser extent, other ground fish. Newly developing refrigeration technology was applied not only on fish boats, but also in the construction of cold storage facilities. In 1913, a second transcontinental railroad was completed, terminating at the port of Prince Rupert. Because of its proximity to rich, unexploited halibut banks, its ocean and rail links, and the infusion of private capital investment in cold storage facilities, the city became the centre of the halibut fishery, and the second major urban centre in the provincial fisheries (next to Vancouver).⁶

The first world war also created a heavy demand for canned herring and pilchard. Coupled with a developing market for the cheaper canned

fall salmon, Vancouver Island, rich in all three fisheries, emerged as a third major fishing area. However, because sockeye production there was poor, the area remained relatively undeveloped. The wartime boom was short-lived, and, with the sudden signing of the armistice, all three markets collapsed.

As mentioned, wartime prosperity eroded the dominant position of B.C. Packers, through excessive competition and over-expansion. Federal fisheries officers stationed in the province noted the trend with great alarm.

It would appear, however, that the investor and those who think they can earn a living by entering the fishing industry are turning their attention exclusively to canning operations as being a medium for getting rich quick, but it must be remembered that whilst canneries no doubt produce profit not equalled in many other lines of commerce, still they have their off seasons...unlimited canneries would mean unlimited fishing, with the result that the fisheries would be depleted, and the smaller investor would go to the wall while only the big companies would remain in operation.

The prevailing price for canned salmon can hardly be called normal, and when commerce again assumes normal conditions, the prices to the fishermen and manufacturers will no doubt reach a level (DMF, 1917: 244).

By the beginning of the war, B.C. Packers' production had already fallen to 25 percent of the provincial canned salmon pack, and it fell further during the war years. Between 1919 and 1925, it accounted for only one-sixth of the canned pack (Gregory and Barnes, 1939: 95). Gregory and Barnes note that the three combines of the Pacific northwest fisheries, Alaska Packers Association (Alaska and Puget Sound), Columbia River Packers Association (Alaska and Columbia River), and B.C. Packers (British Columbia) continued to exert considerable power, but, throughout the war, they found stiff competition from smaller firms. Post-war expansion was severely curtailed by two recessions in the

1920s, which were especially severe in this industry, and by the depression in the following decade. The collapse of wartime markets and the recessions forced many of these small operations out of business. All three combines moved in to buy up the smaller concerns, but their expansion placed them in jeopardy.

The combines experienced a different set of difficulties from the small firms. In economic hard times, small operators could cut losses because they generally leased their equipment. The large firms, however, held huge inventories in the form of pack carryovers, equipment and cannery properties. Gregory and Barnes (1939: 102) described the effect on B.C. Packers:

The British Columbia Packers Association...approximated the unfortunate experience of the American companies during these post-war years. An old firm, it purchased a large number of high-priced canneries in the late 1920s, paying for them in newly issued stock and also in cash. The consolidation proved unsuccessful and the company was forced into bankruptcy in the early 'thirties'. It was taken over by banks and can manufacturing companies which had advanced considerable amounts of credit. Subsequently a number of its canneries were closed.

B.C. Packers managed to survive bankruptcy, and the year 1928 represents another round in the cycle of buying up and closing plants. In 1930, quick freezing methods were introduced in fresh/frozen processing, but it was not until the wartime demand in the next decade that the technique became widely adopted. Fish boats and packers, equipped with refrigeration units, could now transport fish over long distances. Economies of scale became feasible because it was no longer necessary to establish processing facilities close to points of resource capture. Instead, operations could be combined and concentrated in urban areas, close to marketing outlets. In turn, as canning technology

began to require more capital investment, this new refrigeration technology provided a new avenue of entry for small operators. The large canning companies, like B.C. Packers and Canfisco, retained dominance by consolidating these various technologies in huge plants. When fresh fish markets were strong, they could divert salmon from the can, and vice versa when markets changed.

Like the first, the second world war created artificial markets. The United Kingdom relied heavily on the B.C. fisheries for canned salmon and herring (canned herring production only proved feasible during wartimes), vitamin A supplements from fish reduction, and fish meal for fertilizer used in domestic food production for wartime needs. Beginning in 1941, the British Ministry of Food negotiated with the Canadian government for guaranteed packs and prices. Two-thirds of Canadian production of canned salmon was procured. The following year, the British government purchased the entire provincial pack of canned salmon and herring (canning herring had ceased after the first war and ceased again in 1948) (Muszynski, 1984).

The diversion of canned salmon to wartime markets stimulated domestic and American demand for fresh/frozen fish. This became the new entry point for small processors. While in the pre-depression period small operators established largely manually-operated canneries on remote streams, now they built small cold storage facilities to take advantage of fresh/frozen fish demand. However, B.C. Packers and Canfisco retained their dominant positions. They were less dependent on prices for fresh/frozen products than were small operators, who generally lacked large cold storage facilities in which to store the

product and wait out gluts on the market. The large firms consolidated their operations in multi-line and multi-product plants. The core of their business revolved around established brand names for canned salmon. If canned salmon markets weakened, they had a double advantage. They could switch to other processes, like fresh/frozen fish. Or they could store their canned salmon packs and wait for prices to rise.

Guaranteed packs and prices lasted until 1948, when the British could purchase only a fraction of the pack due to a dollar shortage. The Canadian state intervened and bought a portion of the canned herring pack for overseas relief aid. During the war years, only small amounts of canned salmon were released on the domestic market. Domestic demand was strong through 1948, with two-thirds of the pack consumed domestically, an increase in excess of 70 percent of pre-war demand (B.C. Packers, Annual Report 1948). However, the following year and thereafter, market demand slackened. In 1949, the canners collectively engaged in a "no brand" advertising campaign to reintroduce the product to Canadian consumers. J. H. Todd & Sons Ltd. appear to have experienced special difficulty in this respect, and it might be one reason for the company's absorption by the big two. It should also be mentioned that buying well-established firms had a further advantage than simply eliminating the competition. The cannery men were employed by the new owners. The Nelsons, in particular, have figured in important positions within the B.C. Packers' organisation. This was a good way of using the expertise of one's competitors to advantage.

By the end of the 1940s, then, the major processing techniques included canning, reduction, filleting and cold storage. Beginning in

the 1950s and continuing in the 1960s, B.C. Packers not only bought out smaller, well-established rivals in conjunction with Canfisco, it also began to close outlying canneries. Operations were consolidated and concentrated in three central facilities located in Steveston, Prince Rupert and Namu (central district). This process had severe impacts for native labour forces, especially those living in the north, as discussed in the following chapter. Events over the next two decades, the 1970s and 1980s, have been briefly discussed and will be elaborated in reference to labour organisation and resistance.

Brief mention should be made of the various associations fishing companies formed to promote their collective interests. The first association was formed in 1892 when the fishing companies formed a Cannery Association with headquarters in Victoria. In 1902, the Fraser River Association opened its headquarters in New Westminster, on the Fraser. In 1908, this Association became the British Columbia Fisheries Association until 1923, when it became a branch of the Can Manufacturers' Association. In 1937, it re-emerged as the Salmon Cannery Operating Committee, with a final name change in 1951, to the Fisheries Association (Gladstone, 1959: 100). This group has been the body with which the trade unions in the industry have had to negotiate.

Canning Technology and the Labour Process

As mentioned earlier, existing technology lay the foundation upon which the provincial canning industry was built. Discovery of the method of rolling out thin sheets of metal into tinplate formed the basis of the canning industry. Canning involves organisation of labour

around assembly line production of a standardised product. Initially, labour was assigned to tasks on the assembly lines that were labour intensive. Gradually, machines were introduced at various points. The entire line has never been wholly mechanised. This has meant that bottlenecks occur when a new machine is introduced at one point, speeding that particular process. Canning salmon begins when the fish is landed at the dock (generally in fish packers by tendermen) and ends with shipment of the canned product.

Labourers working inside the plants were never given the entire task of processing the fish from start to finish. "It is of course only by an organised system of action and the minute subdivision of labour that the operations of the industry, from the cutting up of the tin plates, the shaping, the soldering up to the final labelling of the cans, after the insertion and cooking of the contents, can be profitably carried on" (DMF, 1879: 297). Tasks requiring the most labourers occurred at the start of the process, in the preparation of the fish (washing and butchering) and in making the tin cans.

Canners required large labour forces prepared to work for cheap wages, long hours and short seasons. Initially, they used two groups, native women and Chinese men. Attempts were made to bring in European women and children, but, initially, without much success. For example, in 1870, Governor Musgrave requested five thousand dollars in order to assist the introduction of female immigrants into British Columbia (Sessional Papers, 1871: IV, 4(18), 4). Attempts were also made to bring children from England as labourers. "British Columbia is much in want of a class of beings much too numerous in England, that is boys and

girls, say from ten or eight to fifteen years old for help on the farms and in the cities. What I desire is to have a lot of these children sent out from England from among disease, filth and immorality, to good, healthy frugal homes in this beautiful clime" (ibid., 1883: XVI, 12(93), 11). It was further suggested (and approved by the Minister of Agriculture) that expenditures incurred in transporting these children could be deducted from their wages.

A member of the B.C. parliament attributed the scarcity of female white labour as being the cause for employing Chinese men. Senator MacDonald noted that if the same number of women were available in British Columbia as lived in Ontario, "they would do all that kind of light work, and then, of course, I would be in favour of doing away with Chinese labour altogether." In fact, when the female population living in urban areas increased, the numbers of Chinese men employed decreased. MacDonald went on to note that the price of white male labour in British Columbia was too high because these men came to the province with "old California ideas." They came in search of gold at a time when money was plentiful and labour scarce, "where labour is cheap, advantage will be taken of the circumstance, no matter by whom it is furnished, whether by black or by white - no matter what the colour of the employees may be" (ibid., 1885: XVIII, 12(54a), pp. xxii, xxix & xxx).

In 1885, the Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration was published. Employers linked the use of labour at cheap wages with racial criteria. Most of the Chinese who originally came to British Columbia, in the early 1870s, were miners. Although some laboured on their own account, they came to be used as cheap replacements for white

men. Thus, the superintendent of the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company (Limited) noted that his company was suffering from a strike by white labourers when Chinese labourers became available, "and we accepted the Chinese as a weapon with which to settle the dispute. With a little more trouble we might, I think, have obtained Indians to answer our purpose equally well." While approximately 400 white labourers received no less than \$2 per day, the labour force of some 150 Chinese men received from \$1 to \$1.25 per day. Dunsmuir, the proprietor of the Wellington mines, testified that the Chinese performed the manual labour white men refused to do. "White men decline to do the work given to the Chinese, and could not live in this country at the present prices of products on the wages paid the Chinamen" (ibid.: xvi & xviii).

White male labourers expressed the fear that low wages would depress the entire wage scale of the provincial economy, thus keeping white labourers from the province. Commissioner Gray disagreed, concluding that, with the exception of 130 Chinese men employed as boot-makers in Victoria, Chinese labour in no way interfered with skilled labour. "They are made, so far as provincial legislation can go, perpetual aliens, and with the Indians are by positive terms denied the political and municipal franchises attached to property and person, conceded to other British subjects, born or naturalized, when of sufficient age to exercise them" (ibid.: xi). The commissioners concluded that, without Chinese labourers, several industries would not only not have succeeded, but possibly might not have been started. The example given was the canned salmon industry.

New Westminster on the Fraser river, circa 1883, had a population of approximately 300 permanent Chinese settlers. During the salmon fishing season, which lasted from two to three months, this population swelled to between 1200 and 1500. Chinese labourers were recruited from Oregon, Washington, California and Victoria, for the inside labour required in the canneries. Each cannery contracted a Chinese agent who hired the entire plant labour force. Native labourers were also hired by contractors (native as well as Chinese) while the few white skilled labourers and supervisors were hired directly by the canners. The commissioners concluded, in their 1885 report:

It is fortunate that, in a young and sparsely settled Province, this cheap labor can be obtained, for it enables those whose minds are capable of higher development, and whose ambition looks to more ennobling industry - to follow pursuits in which they will rise - rather than toil and slave in groveling work, which wears out the body without elevating the mind (ibid.: xix).

In the previous chapter, an argument was made for the historical development of two distinct but interrelated labour processes. Evidence presented in this royal commission by employers, white male labourers and the commissioners themselves, attests to this fact. The commissioners also noted cheap labour encouraged capitalists to bring money into the province, and employ it in fixed rather than labour costs. "The evidence shows most distinctly that the price of white labour of the lowest kind is at such a figure that he cannot use his capital to advantage and with safety, while with the prices charged by the Chinese for similar labour, he can" (ibid.).

However, the construction of a transcontinental railroad threatened this labour supply. And, for reasons discussed in the following

chapter, native labourers also presented problems to salmon canners, especially on the Fraser. As canners faced labour problems, they began to mechanise the lines.

The contract price per case has decreased. The price now is cheaper than formerly. In the ordinary work the machine has taken the place of the ordinary work and the men employed in these places are experts in their lines. There is a competition among the cannery contractors to get the experts, which has a tendency to raise the wages...The wages paid to Chinese ten years ago in the cannery business was much less than now (Mar Chan, Chinese contractor, Sessional Papers, 1902: XXXVI, 13(54), 142).

While mechanisation on an extensive scale did not occur until after the turn of the century, machines were used before then. For example, the introduction of several "labor-saving contrivances," circa 1881, in some Fraser river canneries, reduced by about 30 percent the cost of manipulating cans (DMF, 1882: 202). The fishery inspector noted in his report the use of a "travelling platform worked by an endless chain." The conveyor belt, although a very primitive piece of equipment, was of central importance in fragmenting the labour process into boring and repetitive tasks, a point made by Braverman (1974). The conveyor belt allowed tasks to be fragmented and labour allocated to each task. Along this assembly line, machines were gradually introduced. Thus, in 1881, retorts and soldering machines were adopted. By the turn of the century, labour requiring between 300 and 400 people a decade earlier could now be performed by 120 (Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, 1902: 136).

While mechanisation reduced the total number of labourers required, it also introduced a new category of skilled labour required to tend the new machinery when in use, and to overhaul it each season since it lay

idle during the winter. This skilled labour corresponded to craft skills developed by European men.

There was never a time in this Province when white people were available for doing the labour inside the canneries. By the introduction of machinery we have had to employ more high class labour. It turns out the low class of oriental labour and brings in a high class of white labour to look after the machines...Under existing circumstances the canneries could not be carried on without oriental labour (testimony of Alexander Ewen, in *ibid.*: 139).

Skill became attached to machinery rather than to manual operations. Chinese men had developed expertise in several of the salmon canning operations; for example, butchering salmon, making cans, detecting defective filled cans simply by sound (by tapping each can with a nail). When the industry was new, the labourers hired for the jobs developed these skills (they were not imported from other industries since many of the original Chinese labourers were peasants). However, as racism grew in the province, Chinese immigration was increasingly curtailed. Chinese labourers originally recruited because they were available in large numbers and for cheap wages, were, by the turn of the century, skilled, scarce and therefore could command higher wages. Rather than meeting their demands, cannery mechanised the lines, displacing skilled Chinese labour and introducing skilled white machinemen.

At the turn of the century, of an estimated 20,000 employed in the fisheries, half worked in the canneries. Of this number, an estimated 6,000 were Chinese men working in 74 canneries (49 of them located on the Fraser), receiving from \$35 to \$45 per month. That they had become a scarce and skilled labour force is evident in the fact that cannery

extended the season for the most skilled Chinese workmen by hiring them to make the cans as well as process the fish, in spite of their access to a can-making factory on the Fraser river (in New Westminster). The canners claimed they could make the cans at least as cheaply as they could buy them. Can-makers were paid as much as \$50 to \$60 per month, with about 30 hired per cannery (ibid.: 135 & 141).

The Fraser River was located close to growing urban centers with large China towns. As the salmon canning industry expanded, northern streams (especially those on the Skeena and Nass rivers) were exploited. Crews had to be transported by boat from the south. This was expensive, and canners therefore made greater use of native workers. English-speaking native men were hired to contract entire villages to move unto the cannery site for the fishing season. Payment was generally made on a family basis at the end of the season.

Many native men began to fish for the canning companies. Canners tried to use these men as cheap sources of labour. In the early period, towards the end of the nineteenth century, while Japanese and European fishers bargained over fish prices, native fishers were hired for wages. Canners endeavoured to secure native fishers as a reserve, alternating between outside work on the grounds and inside work in the factories. However, this pattern was of short duration. Apart from working in the net lofts, men resisted employment on the canning lines. This was assigned to native women, children, and, in times of heavy runs, the elderly.

Thus, while the labour of native fishers was diverted to work for the canners, its nature remained unaltered, especially in the early

period, before the fishing fleets were mechanised (begun with the conversion of boats from sail to engine power). However, the labour of native women was proletarianised. Traditionally, women processed the salmon, chiefly through drying and curing. In the division of labour inside the canneries, native women (and their children) occupied the lowest positions. They were primarily employed washing fish and filling salmon tins (work they still perform today), for which they were originally paid piece rates. Unlike the Chinese, they were never guaranteed work for the season, but were called in when needed. This was the great advantage of having entire villages relocate to the canneries during the fishing season, especially in the remote northern areas. Native women received the lowest wages. For example, in 1885, men working in the canneries averaged 30 dollars per month, while native women received an average of 13 dollars, and native boys were paid seven dollars per month. Ultimately, however, machinery was judged preferable even to cheap labour, since machines "will make us independent of any particular class of labour" (ibid.: 162-163).

As noted earlier, the industry had "taken off" by the turn of the century. In 1903, and again in 1905, cannery owners were forced to limit boat catches to 200 salmon per boat daily at the height of the runs, because of the difficulty of securing enough inside labour. Most of the machines introduced to that date were placed towards the end of the assembly line (for example, retorts cooked the fish in the cans, and soldering machines attached the lids to the filled cans). However, most of the manual work occurred at the beginning of the line, in washing and butchering the fish. The bottleneck was overcome with the invention and

introduction, around 1905, of the "Iron Chink" or Smith butchering machine.⁷ Two machine operators could now perform the work of 51 expert Chinese butchers (DMF, 1906-7: lxi). The introduction of the "Iron Chink," the only machine developed specifically for salmon canning, transformed the line, since a machine now controlled the first stages of the process, the butchering and cutting up of the fish. The speed of the line could be paced to the machine, and the entire line could be organised mechanically (Stacey, 1982: 20-24).

By 1907, the iron butcher was sufficiently developed to automatically clean the fish and supply two or three lines. With the introduction of machinery, more canning lines could operate simultaneously, and overall input increased. At the same time, however, capital costs increased, giving larger operators an advantage over small ones. The use of iron butchers stimulated adoption of other machines to speed the process at other points. By 1912, the sanitary can and double seamer were added. Stacey estimates the adoption of this equipment led to a 30 to 35 percent reduction in the labour force. American Can Company introduced them to British Columbia, and was able to attain a virtual monopoly over this type of can-making machinery (*ibid.*: 23). Apart from iron butchers, it leased most of the machines on the lines to the canneries, and in this way made some small canning operations viable. Many plants ceased their local can-making operations, and American Can became the chief supplier. Local can-making operations continued in the north, because it was costly to ship empty and bulky cans to remote canneries. Many outlying canneries continued to be manually intensive, and did not use iron butchers. The invention of

collapsed cans did not prove feasible due to problems with proper sealing (and potential problems of botulism), and pre-formed cans became standard in the province.

Thus, a series of machines were introduced at various stages to overcome bottlenecks and labour shortages. These machines were usually fed by other machines inter-connected by conveyor belts. Workers monitored the process, and maintained, repaired and adjusted the machinery. The machinemen, many holding engineering tickets, became ever more important. Yet, until very recently, canning operations have employed large numbers of manual labourers to wash the fish being fed to the iron butchers, as well as filling cans. Native women provided the original labour, and, later, women from other ethnic groups joined them. The vast majority of these women have been recent immigrants, their job opportunities limited by their inability to speak English. As the technology changed, new jobs were filled by these women, and Chinese men increasingly displaced as the jobs they filled were mechanised.

Conclusion

A distinctive characteristic of the salmon canning industry is its unchanging nature. The basic assembly line process has remained constant. The significant changes have been connected to the gradual introduction of machines that displaced manual skilled labour. Machinery, especially the iron butchers, allowed canners flexibility in choosing their labour forces. The small core of skilled machinemen required to tend and overhaul these machines were European men permanently employed and paid directly by the canners. The seasonal

labour force could be drawn from native villages and the growing urban centres, and was predominantly female. Machines in place by the first world war did not change greatly thereafter. The major changes involved refining existing machines to increase output and intensify the labour process. Can-filling machines were adopted in the 1960s, displacing female labour. In the mid-1980s, machines were introduced to wash fish mechanically. If adopted on a large scale, the last intensive manual process will have been mechanised. However, following the second world war, introduction of machinery has been heavily resisted by the union (see Chapter 7).

While the technological changes may be unimpressive, their impact on the labour process was revolutionary. Not only was skill taken from the labourer and incorporated in machines, machines themselves came to direct the labour process. In turn, this made labour power more productive and eventually resulted in fewer labourers needed to produce the same or more commodities. Thus, the transition from the stage of machinofacture to industrial production was gradual, involving different segments of the assembly line at different periods, allowing the basic process of production to continue while transforming the content from manual to machine production.

¹ Information contained in this chapter is taken from two published sources: "Class Formation and Class Consciousness: The Making of Shoreworkers in the B.C. Fishing Industry" (Studies in Political Economy, 1986), and "Major Processors to 1940, and Early Labour Force: Historical Notes" (Chapter 2 in Uncommon Property, edited by Marchak, Guppy and McMullan, forthcoming), both by Muszynski.

² "Fishing was the basis of Northwest Coast economy" (Drucker, 1963: 35).

³ Drucker (1963: 7) notes "the seasonal aspect of the principal 'harvests' of fish...made for periods of intense activity, put a premium on the development of techniques for the preservation of foodstuffs, and, once such techniques had been developed, permitted lengthy periods of leisure."

⁴ There has been considerable debate over who first canned salmon in British Columbia. Cobb (1930: 471), for example, credits James Symes in 1867, although his was an experiment.

⁵ Gladstone (1959: 66) also makes the point that, although Canada is a large producer of fish, per capita consumption is small.

⁶ Gladstone (1959: 80) notes that the introduction of refrigerated cars by the C.P.R. "opened up vast markets in eastern Canada and the U.S.A. As a consequence, the movement of the industry northward developed Prince Rupert as a fishing centre until it has become the major halibut port in the world. It owes this position not only to its relatively close proximity to the halibut grounds, but also to the railroad."

⁷ The name "Iron Chink" appeared on the plates of these machines and can be found on them. They were so called because of the Chinese labour they displaced.

CHAPTER 4

The Partial Transformation of Coastal Peoples from Fishers, Hunters and Gatherers to Cheap Wage Labourers

The development of the B.C. salmon canning industry is an interesting case study because it illustrates how capitalists used pre-capitalist relations of production to structure cheap labour forces. Cheap labour forces can be created when pre-capitalist relations of production are transformed under capitalism, simultaneously releasing labour power for industrial employment while subsistence needs continue to be partially met within pre-capitalist relations of production. Labourers can then be employed for wages below the costs necessary for the production and reproduction of their labour power, precisely to the extent that those costs are borne outside capitalist relations of production.

Native Economies

In order to understand how B.C. salmon cannerys used native labour, it is necessary to briefly describe the pre-capitalist economies of the area that became known as British Columbia.

Prior to European contact, native peoples formed a fairly dense concentration of diverse cultures and social groupings. Duff (1977:8)

notes: "Except for barren and inaccessible areas which are not utilized even today, every part of the Province was formerly within the owned and recognised territory of one or other of the Indian tribes." While the population as a whole was large, the core economic unit consisted of "small localized groups of people who lived together throughout the year" (Duff, 1977: 16). Membership followed kinship rules of descent and exogamous marriage, but the rules varied greatly from one tribe to another. The tribes also possessed varied concepts of ownership rights to the land and resources. In general, stratification increased as one travelled from the Fraser river north to Alaska.

There were no political institutions of the nature of a state or a kingdom. The power of any one clan was defined in terms of its relationships to clans connected to it through kinship.¹ Its power was tied to its ability in exchanging wealth through potlatches. The institution of the potlatch served to redistribute food and wealth throughout the area, and prevented any one group from amassing too much wealth, and, consequently, power. It also served as a means of conferring rank, or of stratifying groups.²

The northern coastal tribes, especially the Tlingit and Tsimshian, had the most rigidly defined social and economic relationships. Matrilineal households or lineages were the basic economic units, and they joined larger tribal groupings. The basic economic units operated autonomously during the summer, going to the individual hunting and gathering grounds. They assembled in the larger groupings in the winter, in a common village. Along the central coast, local bilateral kin groups clustered into named tribes. They also shared a village for

part of the year. The Kwakiutl adhered most closely to this pattern, while the Coast Salish organised in a looser web of bilateral kinship ties (Duff, 1977: 16).

In summary, the coastal tribes had developed a wide variety of social groupings around comparable economic units based on variously defined kin associations. The total economic system consisted of a large number of loosely associated units, some internally stratified by rank, each claiming rights to certain key fishing, hunting, and berry and root gathering sites. This particular economic organisation appears to have made ideal use of the environment, in terms of a hunting and gathering mode of production. To use fishing as an example (fish was a basic staple), the resource (for example, salmon, herring, eulachon) concentrated in particular spots along the coast at various times in the year. The supply varied from year to year (sockeye salmon, for example, run on four year cycles with two good years and two poor ones). Thus, most units could realise some years of great abundance and some years of near starvation. The potlatch, universal among all tribes, served as a medium of redistributing surplus among all groups.

The Potlatch as Means of Redistributing Surplus

The potlatch was a feast given by one clan to which members of another were invited. It was marked by a period of ceremonies and feasting, and highlighted by the hosts giving their wealth to the guests. In exchange for wealth, guests gave prestige to their hosts. However, wealth could only be acquired through the individual group's access to resources. "In the last instance the potlatch was an

institution for validating claims to resources, land titles, and the right to acquire surplus products from the use of clan lands" (Averkieva, 1971: 334). Suttles argues the institution involved more than this set of relations. He studied the Coast Salish, organised along bilateral kinship lines. Residence was patrilocal, with brothers, cousins and brothers-in-law forming extended families with claims to certain local resources. One or more extended family formed a village or community, and communities were linked together through marriage and kinship (Suttles, 1960: 296).

Co-parents-in-law formed a key relationship binding groups together. The parents-in-law exchanged wealth at the wedding and continued to exchange wealth for the duration of the marriage. Suttles argues the wide fluctuations in the productivity of certain resources and in individual skill involved in processing them led to interdependence among these units. Co-parents-in-law brought food to each other. The food was then shared in a feast with one's own people. The group bringing the food acquired prestige. The potlatch involved feasting at a higher level, linking communities rather than its basic units. Suttles makes a distinction between food and wealth. Food was given freely, could not be refused, nor could it be offered for sale. However, wealth was acquired on the basis of a group's or community's ability to acquire surplus food, thus releasing certain individuals to concentrate on creating wealth in the form of blankets, shell ornaments, fine basketry, hide shirts, bows and arrows, canoes and waging warfare to capture slaves (Suttles, 1960: 301).

Wealth was credit for food received, and the potlatch served to redistribute wealth. "The rather pronounced differences in resources among communities, plus year-to-year fluctuations in quantities, must have put a premium on intercommunity cooperation" (ibid.: 302). However, access to particularly productive sites could mean one group could amass surplus and thus convert it into wealth. The potlatch was a system to redistribute wealth and keep it from becoming concentrated in a few hands. The host community gave away its wealth in exchange for prestige and a reaffirmation of group title to its territory and resources. It served to legitimate its control over these through its ability to use them productively, generate surplus, convert it into wealth and then share it. The communities to whom the wealth was given recognised the host community's ownership title by accepting the gifts. Suttles concludes the potlatch did not so much represent a drive for high status, nor production to secure surplus, nor cooperation of the potlatching community, but rather was part of a larger socioeconomic system enabling the entire social network to maintain a high level of food production and to equalise food consumption (ibid.: 304).

It is important to remember, however, that the potlatch, like any other important social institution, contained contradictions and was subject to change. While the stress here has been on its redistributive aspects, the potlatch was also used by individuals to acquire power, both within their own group and more widely. And Piddock (1969) argues the fur trade encouraged the latter tendency by introducing new forms of wealth procurable by the individual rather than the group.³

Using Suttles' argument, Piddocke examines potlatching among the Kwakiutl. He demonstrates the changes that took place after European contact. The fur traders introduced a non-traditional source of wealth into this network of economic exchange. Initially, the Kwakiutl attempted to incorporate this wealth through potlatching. The situation was further complicated by two factors. First, European contact resulted in the decimation of large numbers of native peoples, especially through the spread of epidemics like smallpox. Among the Kwakiutl, many ranks became vacant. Individual traders acquiring wealth through the fur trade held potlatches to acquire these ranks. Rather than sharing wealth, the potlatch now became a means whereby individuals sought power. As more wealth was generated through the fur trade, the frequency and intensity of potlatches grew, to the horrified fascination of missionaries, government officials and some anthropologists. Wealth was no longer shared, but actually destroyed to demonstrate prestige. Duff quotes part of a speech made in 1895 by an old Kwakiutl chief: "When I was young I saw streams of blood shed in war...Now we fight with our wealth" (Duff, 1977: 59).

Establishment of forts presented a second difficulty. Those groups most heavily involved in the fur trade changed their residence, moving to the forts. When Fort Rupert was created in 1849, four communities moved to it, establishing permanent residence. (A similar move was made by the Tsimshian when seven communities relocated to Fort Simpson.) The relationship among the four had to be re-worked, and the method employed was the potlatch. Potlatches became contests to see which individual could throw away more wealth and thus acquire power.

Whereas, originally, potlatches served to establish and cement bonds between communities, they became, in the post-contact period, a means of acquiring power, often in the hands of individuals rather than the group (Pidcocke, 1969: 153).⁴

The reason the potlatch has received so much attention here is to demonstrate the interdependence of a wide variety of small economic units exploiting the available resources. Although the technology was that of a hunting and gathering economy, the entire socioeconomic system generated considerable surplus used to develop a rich and diverse culture. Economic inequality and exploitation existed, and were more pronounced among certain tribes, but the entire economic organisation depended on cooperation. Any external influence upset the equilibrium, and, at best, required adjustment within the system, as appears to have occurred in the first phase of European contact. However, the fur trade introduced an ideology of individual gain and prestige, and the means whereby an individual, rather than the group, could acquire wealth. This is not to deny that individualism existed in pre-contact times. Averkieva (1971) has noted the tendency among the Tlingit towards patriarchal private property relations, while Wolf (1982: 186-189) notes the existence of a nobility and of slavery. However, the Europeans influenced the direction of change. Moreover, European economic relations directly contradicted those of native peoples in British Columbia. This was not evident during the initial contact period because the industrial revolution was just beginning to change the mode of production in western Europe, and because the Europeans initially did not intend to develop provincial resources other than fur. Since

coastal peoples relied on fish as a basic staple, their economic organisation was not initially threatened.

From the Fur Trade to European Settlement

The trading company represented European power during the period of the fur trade. After amalgamating with the North West Company in 1821, the Hudson's Bay Company held a monopoly position in what became known as British Columbia.⁵ The colony of Vancouver Island was created in 1849, when the British government granted title to the company. The first governor resigned shortly after taking office and was succeeded, in 1851, by James Douglas. The year 1858 marked a transition from the predominance of the fur trade to a growing emphasis on settlement. That was the year a second colony was created, the mainland of British Columbia. Douglas resigned his post with the Hudson's Bay Company to become governor of both colonies. The colonies were united in 1866, and, in 1871, entered confederation.

The second half of the nineteenth century marked an economic transition. The fur traders organised economic relationships oriented to overseas markets, and were interested in the colonial economy only in terms of its extractive capacities. The native peoples occupied an important position as suppliers of the resource. The year 1858 marked the beginning of the gold rush, and the entrance of a new type of foreigner into the colonies. Gold seekers had no use for the native peoples except in subsidiary roles; for example, as guides or prostitutes. And, for the first time, the two groups competed directly over resources. Thus, gold miners working the Fraser canyon disrupted

the salmon fishing and processing operations of native groups on the river. The conflict led to violence. "Some of the miners came up from California boasting that they would 'clean out all the Indians in the land,' and there were instances of the kind of indiscriminate killing of Indians that was a feature of the American west" (Fisher, 1980: 98). Unlike the American west, however, the Indians held their ground, and Douglas intervened to diffuse the situation.

The gold rush was short-lived, but it represented the first stage of a new economic relationship between Europeans and resources, one of direct access. Gold miners were a largely transient population, unlike the settlers who followed them. The settlers were interested in one thing, land. Access to it was mediated by European governors of the colony, who disposed of it under the assumption that it belonged to the Crown. "Absolute title (a European concept) has been vested in the Crown ever since Britain, Spain, Russia, and the United States, without consulting any Indians, settled the questions of sovereignty over this continent" (Duff, 1977: 66fn). The British state recognised an obligation towards native peoples, but it was founded on the assumption that they were its subjects. As native peoples themselves were to point out time and again, however, they never entered, either voluntarily or through armed struggle, into any such relationship with a foreign power. The concept of European title to the lands of British Columbia was imported by the Europeans who came to settle there. In other words, they simply assumed the land belonged to them and they took it. While the settlers and the provincial government denied any obligation to the original inhabitants, the colonial government under Douglas (but not his

successors) and the federal government did recognise an obligation to "extinguish" aboriginal title, by treaties and allocation of reserve lands.

Clearly such concepts of private property relations to land and resources were foreign to the native inhabitants. Their concepts of ownership were based on acknowledged rights to use the land and its resources, rights that had to be negotiated by one group with its neighbours. And the rights carried with them an obligation to share surplus in return for recognition of title (for example, through the potlatch). However, the European code of rights was ultimately backed by armed force, and there are numerous instances in the various government reports of the use of armed vessels to "settle" disputes over land rights. The native population was at a disadvantage because its weaponry was inferior to that of the Europeans and there was no cohesive political institution that could negotiate on its behalf in Victoria, Ottawa, and London.

The fisheries were to play a crucial role in the conflict, since they were vital to the coastal native economies. And the first major capitalist thrust in the north was made by salmon canners. The missionary Duncan took on the role of intermediary on behalf of the northern Tsimshian. At his request, Indian Reserve Commissioner O'Reilly travelled to the mission village of Metlakatla, in 1881, to conduct hearings. The reason for the urgency was "the Indian fisheries were being taken possession of by whites for cannery purposes, and that if steps were not taken to secure to the Indians their fisheries, they would suffer great injustice" (Metlakatlah Commission, 1884:1xxvi). The

Metlakatla Indians demanded the entire peninsula in question, including Turner's fishery on the Skeena, the location of Inverness cannery (the first constructed in the north). O'Reilly replied he had no power to deal with lands sold to the whites. While he did his best to reserve the sites demanded by native groups, provincial administrators later claimed he had been too generous and cut back the size of many of the original allocations. In the end, settlers and capitalists received the major concessions. Salmon canners established their plants pretty well where they wished, occasionally running into disputes with local groups. The native population was assigned specific tracts of land and specific fishery sites. Thus, the overall socio-economic system enforced through the potlatch was truncated. However, native economies were not destroyed, but continued alongside capitalist relations of production. As the original native system was dismembered, individual native economic units became dependent on capitalist relations of production.

Had the provincial policy of ignoring native claims to the land and resources triumphed, and the native population either exterminated or absorbed within European colonisation, then its mode of production would, in fact, have disappeared. But dominion policy was to recognise some form of aboriginal title, enough to enable native groups to continue the battle for legal rights. In addition, although no new treaties were made, reserves continued to be laid aside. Therefore, a land base within the developing capitalist mode of production was secured. The Indian agents appointed by the federal government tried to induce the native population to become cultivators. But they had little success, partly due to the nature of the land itself. Much of the

coastal land cannot be cultivated, and the reserves were often laid out on land the settlers did not value, land not worth cultivating. The native population continued its traditional economic pursuits, incorporating wage labour, especially that offered by canners, into its traditional pattern.

The hunting and gathering economy (fishing is here incorporated as part of hunting) was marginalised. The land and resource base was appropriated by settlers and capitalists, and held for them by the state. But there was enough of it left for native use to enable the native population to preserve some form of its pre-capitalist mode of production. Its entry into capitalist relations, therefore, was partial. In one way, this made it an ideal labour force for salmon canners. The native people, at least in the early period, were fairly numerous, willing to work irregular hours and short seasons (since these corresponded to their own economic activities), and, above all, since they did not depend totally on wages to subsist, and were not conscious of themselves as proletarians, accepted very low wages. Especially in the early period, wages were seen in terms of total revenue accruing to the village. While an individual might not earn very much, certainly not enough to support him/herself, the total for the group was enough to procure the necessities it had come to need from the capitalist economy (for example, staples like lard, tea, as well as clothing and furniture). And, in later years, while younger men appear to have begun regarding their incomes as their own property, native women still appear to have pooled their money (evidence will be provided shortly using oral history accounts).

However, the very factors making native people an ideal cannery labour force also made them difficult to discipline and subordinate. Cannery work was adopted into the seasonal migratory pattern, and, for many people, was one wage employment among several possibilities. Native women and children, for example, began to migrate to the hop fields in Washington state after the cannery season ended. Especially in the 1870s and 1880s, when other populations were still small, many had their pick of employment opportunities, although all tended to be seasonal or short-term (for example, work on railway construction or in sawmills). And winters were generally spent back home on the reserve. Thus, although many coastal people became primarily dependent on cannery work for a wage income, they were not totally dependent, not in the beginning at any rate, and they continued to have non-monetary means of subsisting. Gradually, however, many of them did begin to develop careers in the canneries, and the encroaching capitalist economy made it increasingly difficult to subsist solely on the land or fisheries. While the forces of production originally remained fairly undeveloped, meaning canneries were built close to the resource in remote areas, just as native people became dependent on them, refrigeration and other techniques allowed plants to be moved to urban areas. Rather than canners seeking the resource, now the resource was brought to them, close to major transportation routes. As canneries in remote areas were closed, the coastal villages which had incorporated work there into seasonal migration were left without a major source of wage income.

Native Cannery Workers (1871-1902)

By the 1880s, most coastal villages included salmon canneries as part of their seasonal migration. While Table I provides population figures for this period of time, Table II illustrates the number of canneries by geographic location. The Fraser River canneries, from their inception in the 1870s, almost guaranteed employment to the Coast Salish living in the vicinity, while the Tsimshian were secured places in the Skeena and Nass River plants. But soon the entire coast was involved, including the tribes living on Vancouver Island and along the central coast. The Indian agent for Cowichan agency on Vancouver Island noted that, in the summer of 1881, several villages in the southern part of his district were almost deserted as men, women and children found employment on the Fraser river. He estimated they would return with over \$15,000 in wages (DIA, 1882: 160). Meanwhile, the Indian agent for Fraser river moaned the Indians went off to the commercial fisheries, neglecting the cultivation of reserve land.

There is no class of labourers to compete with them at the fisheries or at steamboating on the Fraser River. Their women, also, who are very industrious, are profitably employed at the fisheries during the fishing season, making nets and cleaning fish for the canneries...The Indians love working in batches together, and much prefer the above kind of employment to agricultural labour (DIA, 1882: 166).

Table I

Population of British Columbia 1871-1901

| YEAR | INDIAN | CHINESE | TOTAL MALE | TOTAL FEMALE | TOTAL ^a |
|---------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 1871 | not known | 1,548 | 7,504 | 3,012 | 10,586 |
| 1880-81 | 25,661 | 4,350 | 29,503 | 19,956 | 49,459 |
| 1890-91 | 25,618 ^b | 8,910 ^c | 63,003 | 35,170 | 98,173 |
| 1901 | 25,488 | 19,482 ^d | 114,160 | 64,497 | 178,657 |

SOURCES: Figures for 1871: Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries 1872 (22). Further categories were also given: Whites: 8576; Negroes: 462. The size of the Indian population was estimated at between 35,000 and 40,000 (a figure that proved to be too high). Census of Canada for 1880-81, 1890-91 and 1901.

- a Differences between the total and the figures under Indian and Chinese were broken down into the various European countries of origin, where the remainder of the population originated. By 1901, they ("whites") formed the majority.
- b The 1880-81 census did not give a figure for this group. The figure is taken from Duff (1977:45).
- c The figure actually represents people born in China. Emigration of Chinese had only recently become legal, however, and thus most of the Chinese were, at this time, born in China.
- d In the 1901 census, Chinese and Japanese were counted together, reflecting the later arrival of Japanese immigrants, as well as the tendency of the European population to lump them together as "orientals," despite the fact that these two groups originated from different countries and did not identify with each other. Adachi breaks the category down as Japanese: 4,597 and Chinese: 14,885 (1976:38).

Table II
Number of Canneries by Location
for the Years 1871-1902

| YEAR | FRASER RIVER | SKEENA RIVER | NASS RIVER | CENTRAL COAST | VANCOUVER ISLAND | TOTAL |
|------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|-------|
| 1871 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| 1875 | 3 | - | - | - | - | 3 |
| 1880 | 7 | 2 | - | - | - | 9 |
| 1885 | 6 | 2 | - | 1 | - | 9 |
| 1890 | 16 | 7 | 3 | 6 | - | 32 |
| 1895 | 21 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 36 |
| 1900 | 42 | 10 | 1 | 11 | 1 | 65 |
| 1902 | 42 | 10 | 2 | 12 | 1 | 67 |

SOURCE: Cicely Lyons, Salmon: Our Heritage (1969), pp.146-147, 164; and pp.705-706. Canneries underwent a great number of changes in owners and locations. Sometimes a cannery would change names when ownership changed, while at other times several canneries might bear the same name. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the precise number of actual canneries in operation in any one year (canneries also occasionally closed one or several seasons and then re-opened). These figures are approximate and should be used as an indication of over-all trends and especially the escalation in the numbers built by the turn of the century on Fraser River, Skeena River and along the central coast. For example, Ralston's figures (1965:2) for the number of canneries on the Fraser accord with those of Lyons until 1890 (he lists 17 in 1890; 28 in 1895; 45 in 1900 and 49 in 1901). Unfortunately, he did not provide a list of canneries on rivers other than the Fraser.

In the following year, 1882, 1300 Indian men were employed on Fraser river, earning an average daily wage of \$1.75, for a season lasting approximately 90 days. Most of them fished. Four hundred Indian women were employed cleaning and canning salmon for \$1.00 a day (DIA, 1883: 61). While such a short season could not provide sufficient employment to feed a European family, the pooled wages for a whole village represented a considerable amount of money. The canners required a large supply of labourers on hand to process all the fish caught (refrigeration techniques at this time were almost non existent, and fish had to be immediately processed or it would spoil). Catching capacity tended to outstrip canning capacity, and fishers were sometimes limited in the number of fish they could land in a twenty-four hour period. Native contractors were sent to the coastal villages to persuade everyone to relocate at the canneries for the season. They had problems holding the labour supply, especially in these years of railroad construction and the scarcity of wage labourers in a thinly populated province. In 1883, the canners caused much discontent among their employees when they held wages until the second run ended.

When the first run of salmon is over on the Fraser River, the Indians are told by the managers or owners of the fisheries, that they have no more work for them until the second run commences, which often is a delay of two weeks; they retain the Indians' money as security that they may not go home or engage in any other occupation until they want them again, therefore, the Indians are obliged to remain idle about New Westminster for that length of time or forfeit their wages. Some Indians come hundreds of miles to labor at the fisheries, and to have them subject to such unfair treatment is certainly a great grievance and one they bitterly complain of (DIA, 1884: 46).

Locations near European settlements also caused incomes to be diverted from buying commodities useful to the village, to the cultivation of individual vices, especially gambling and alcoholism. There was a booming business in New Westminster, Victoria and on Puget Sound, catering to these activities. In addition, native women were recruited as prostitutes in these centres, containing a heavy concentration of single European men. One of the chief reasons Indian agents sought to keep the native population on the reserves was to keep it away from the cities and their attendant vices.⁶

Salmon canners found a more subordinated labour force among Chinese male labourers. In 1884, there was less work available due to increased employment of Chinese men inside the canneries. "The Indians from all parts of this agency [Lower Fraser] complain very much this spring and summer of how they are undermined in the labor market by Chinamen, especially in all kinds of light work, where the Indian women and their boys and girls used to be employed" (DIA, 1885: 104). Chinese men displaced native women in cannery work as well as taking their place in domestic work for private families, doing washing and ironing.⁷ The canners, in turn, had to compete with railroad construction, which, in the mid-1880s, imported large numbers of contracted Chinese labourers. In these years, therefore, large numbers of native women were hired to work in the Fraser river canneries, but the situation on that river was temporary. Fraser river canneries were located close to growing urban centres, in which Chinese contractors operated and which also contained growing China towns with an abundance of Chinese labour. In the north, native peoples continued to be hired in large numbers because they lived

in the area and it was extremely costly to transport labourers from the southern part of the province.

The sheer number of native peoples congregating at New Westminster, on Fraser river, each spring created problems. In 1885, 3,000 came from all over the coast, seeking cannery employment and camping along both banks of the river, from New Westminster to the mouth of the Fraser. Indian agents were not blind to the potentials of such a large gathering.

Indian affairs require careful handling, as, although tribal feuds and jealousies have for long kept distant bands from uniting, still the present labor fields throw the different bands together, and they hear each other's grievances, and although a feeling of discontent is not likely to make any uprising on the land question possible, still it is this feeling which encourages those murders of isolated miners and settlers which were so common a few years ago (DIA, 1886: 81).

This comment indicates one reason for the preference in hiring Chinese instead of native labourers. The native population was dispersed over a large area and still controlled, in a limited way, its own means of subsistence. Village and community organisation was strong. Most native labourers camped near the canneries according to village groupings, and often worked alongside community members. In other words, they were only a partially subordinated labour force, unlike Chinese labourers, organised under the Chinese contract system.

Geographical distance served to separate Chinese labourers from pre-capitalist relations of production. A similar method could not be employed for native labourers, nor was it desirable since salmon canners, especially in remote areas, required proximate labour supplies (thus cutting costs of transporting labourers). As previously

discussed, the potlatch was the institution binding the socioeconomic structure of the native population. Indian agents and missionaries tried to stop the ceremony for years, with varying degrees of success. In 1885, the potlatch was legally banned by special amendment to the Indian Act. Capitalist penetration of the native economies was probably more successful than legal prohibition, but it does indicate a degree of awareness by the European population of its significance. Banning the potlatch served in fact to provide a point of resistance. Especially among the Kwakiutl, the practise continued in secret, and Indian agents complained bitterly of its persistence. The Tsimshian also resisted. They refused to allow any Indian agent to come and reside with them, and the Indian Act could not be enforced in the north for many years. An agent was only appointed in 1887, and he established his residence at Metlakatla, a mission village. The Tsimshian also prevented surveyors from establishing boundaries. Armed cruisers were sent from Victoria, and native leaders arrested (DIA, 1887: x-xi).

Northern native groups could resist more effectively because European settlement had not penetrated that far, and contact with Europeans was not extensive. In the south, however, urban growth made subsistence increasingly difficult. For example, in 1886, the Fraser river salmon run failed. The native population was caught between both modes of production. It could not acquire the fish through traditional methods since the fish were absent. And it could not supplement with food commodities because it could not earn the cash income. To the extent that other food sources were not pursued because villages relocated to the Fraser and to the extent that potlatching as a means of

distributing food was no longer practised, native people faced starvation.

In European society, sexual inequality structured labour in such a way that a different value was assigned to the labour power of each gender. As noted in Chapter 2 this allowed industrial capitalists to employ female labour power below its costs of production and reproduction. In British Columbia, salmon canners were primarily of European extraction, and they brought with them an ideology that valued the labour power of men and women differently, as well as that of non-European races. While native labourers, male and female, were paid lower wages than European labourers, women (and children) were paid the lowest wages. While gender and racial characteristics have nothing to do with the operation of capitalist relations of production in the abstract, they have everything to do with the way those relations are practised. Structures of inequality are used to structure labour forces, paying labourers as low a wage as possible. These structures of inequality allow large groups of labourers to be paid below the costs necessary to produce and reproduce their labour power. While gender and racial divisions are introduced in the work place, pre-capitalist relations of production are necessary to allow these labourers to survive.

Women appear to have played a crucial role in the maintenance of the native economy. The Cowichan Indian agent remarked: "The Indian women and children are always the most eager to go to the hop-fields, where they always earn considerable sums of money, and, amongst these Indians, the wife's purse is generally entirely separate from the

husband's" (DIA, 1887: 92). Women used wages to buy clothing, furniture, stoves and sewing machines, as well as staples like flour, tea and sugar. Many young native men spent their incomes in the urban centres, causing people on the reserves to rely on the earnings of the women and children. Cowichan Indian agent Lomas provided an insightful summary of the effects of wage labour on village life.

All the younger men can find employment on farms or at the sawmills and canneries, and many families are about leaving for the hop fields of Washington Territory; but the very old people who formerly lived entirely on fish, berries and roots, suffer a good deal of hardship through the settling up [sic] of the country. The lands that once yielded berries and roots are now fenced and cultivated, and even on the hills the sheep have destroyed them. Then again, the game laws restrict the time for the killing of deer and grouse, and the fishery regulations interfere with their old methods of taking salmon and trout. With the younger men the loss of these kinds of food is more than compensated for by the good wages they earn, which supplement what they produce on their allotments; but this mode of life does away with their old customs of laying in a supply of dried meat, fish and berries for winter use, and thus the old people again suffer, for Indians are often generous with the food they have taken in the chase, but begrudge giving what they have paid money for, without suitable return (DIA, 1888: 105, emphasis added).

The quote illustrates the dilemma of a people caught in two different economic sets of relations. By the end of the 1880s, a pattern had emerged. In the early spring, the men went hunting and trapping, while the women and old men prepared gardens, planted potatoes, etc. However, as Lomas indicates, the yield from these sources had shrunk. Thus, when the salmon canneries opened in May or June, the entire village, except for the very old, was deserted as people sought to supplement their food supplies with food bought with wages. After the canning season, many families travelled to the hop fields where they could extend their wages (especially women, who did

not have as many employment opportunities as did young men). After the canning season, other groups travelled to their fishing stations to catch and dry fish for their own use. On reserves with land unsuitable for farming, people purchased potatoes and vegetables from others, and concentrated on manufacturing activities during the winter months, including building boats and canoes and household furniture. And women able to afford sewing machines made clothes for their families and to trade or sell (knitting machines were also used to make, for example, the famous Cowichan sweaters).

However, the availability of wage employment was partially caused by the small size of the urban population. In the 1890s, the situation began to change. Ironically, salmon runs at the end of the decade were phenomenally large, but the employment of native peoples declined in proportion to the total labour force employed. In 1894, Superintendent Vowell concluded:

It is noticeable that within the last few years there has been a falling off in the gross earnings of the natives of British Columbia, which may be accounted for by the gradual influx of settlers of every nationality into the province, which increases each year. The Indians do not now, nor can they expect to in the future, make as much money as formerly in any line of industry or enterprise where the natives used to be the only people available for such employment and pursuits; whitemen and Japanese, and others, are at the present time to be seen in all directions and in great numbers competing with them in the labour market, and in the occupations of fishing, trapping and hunting, etc. (DIA, 1895: 202)

The trend Vowell notes was partially suspended in the fishing industry over the next few years because the enormous supply of fish led to the erection of new canneries. Native people were employed in large numbers, but their proportions lessened, especially on the Fraser. Contractors could offer cheap Chinese and Japanese labour (Japanese men

competed with native and European fishers). Cannery jobs were segregated by race and gender, so that encroachments made by specific groups of labourers were perceived in racial terms, rather than as a method allowing employers to keep labour costs minimal.

As indicated in Table II, between 1885 and 1890, the number of canneries increased from 9 to 32, most located on Fraser river. Fishery officers feared overfishing would exhaust salmon stocks, as had occurred on the Columbia river system. In 1892, a fishery commission was appointed to investigate the problem. The evidence submitted gives some indication of the size and composition of cannery labour forces, although there was considerable variation. Overall, the average Fraser river plant employed approximately eight white men (foremen, firemen, and watchmen in charge of the retorts), 100 Chinese men, 40 to 50 native women, and 18 to 20 boys (native and Chinese). One cannery paid native women a dollar a day while white boys received two dollars. Chinese men were generally paid monthly by their contractors. In Wadham's cannery, for example, the "boss Chinaman" received 50 to 70 cents a case or a little over one cent per can. In this case, the Chinese contractors hired native women "and of course these Chinamen pay the Kootenians." He goes on to note "it would not pay any white to do the work the Chinamen do for the pay, or anything like what the canneries would be willing to pay...a white man would starve to death." Native women received ten cents an hour (12-1/2 cents at Wadham's), while Chinese men received between \$30 and \$45 a month. White salmon (which, unlike the red fish, had no value in the can) was given free to the Indians

(testimony of F. L. Lord, B. C. Fishery Commission Report, 1893: 178-179).

Numbers employed in any one day, however, varied a great deal. The canners retained a core of white and Chinese men to whom they guaranteed steady employment (white men were hired directly on to company payrolls and paid by the canners). Around this core, they required a number of casual labourers who could be called in at any time, and who might have to work around the clock. This was the reason it was so handy to have native families camped near the plants. In fact, one pioneer canner, Alexander Ewen, claimed it was necessary for canners to have licensed boats in order to offer employment to native men to fish, thereby making sure they brought their families to the cannery. "The real reason that you want to have those boats of your own and get Indian fishermen as they bring their families around and you have Indian women and boys, and some of the men, not fishermen, to work in the canneries, and when this extra fishing comes on you can take off your own boats and get off to work in the cannery" (ibid.: 117).

The result of the commission hearings was the abolishing of licensed boats on the Fraser river. The end of the decade witnessed a series of phenomenal runs to the river. In 1896, for the first time, a Pacific fish, salmon, generated the highest commercial revenues in the Canadian fisheries. By 1901, 77 canneries were operating in the province, and thousands of fishers, of all nationalities, earned their livelihood on the Fraser alone. This was the golden age of the provincial salmon canning industry. During these years, all available labour, including native, Chinese, Japanese, and European, was in

demand, although job structure continued to mirror gender and racial divisions.

Conclusion

The salmon canning industry is extremely volatile, dependent not only on a large supply of salmon, but also on a market in which provincial canners never dominated. In the early period, the chief market was the British working class. Several countries competed in supplying this market.

Upon its formation, B.C. Packers closed a number of the canneries it had bought, and assumed a dominant position in the industry. However, the two world wars served to erode that position. The wars created a high demand for canned salmon in countries allied to Canada (as a source of cheap protein easily preserved). New entrants flocked into the industry to take advantage of the high profits which could be made. After the second world war, Superintendent Vowell's prediction was finally and irrevocably borne out. One after another, salmon canneries operating for the better part of the century, began to cease operations. The native population in the north suffered especially severely, since that part of the province was settled at a later stage than the south. Canning operations were increasingly combined and moved near large urban centres (Vancouver and Prince Rupert). Canners could now recruit women from newly immigrating overseas populations (Japanese, East Indian, Portuguese, to name the most important), in addition to native women.⁸

By the 1950s, native women could boast of three generations of women in their families who had worked in the same canneries. When the plants closed, the most mobile and best workers, relocated to canneries still operating. But the majority was forced back on reserves with no paid employment. The state filled the gap with unemployment insurance, welfare and old age pensions. It is fitting to conclude with the testimony of native women cannery workers.

Kinship could be traced according to which women worked in which cannery. Mary Hopkins, born in the 1800s, is a retired cannery worker.

I am Bella Bella; my mother is from there. They all worked in canneries, my mother, my grandmother. I started when I was sixteen. Bella Bella, Rivers Inlet, later when I got married Butedale, Klemtu. Oh, I like it. I really enjoyed working in that cannery here. We used to hand fillet the herring. Every summer I worked, worked long hours. Lots of fish; start at eight in the morning and sometimes stop at two, three, four in the morning, no time to rest. We got lots of money then. All the women were working.

When the canneries were closed, there is [sic] no more jobs for us. All the women have time. We were really sad when we heard it; some of them cried. Now we only get welfare. I get old-age pension (Steltzer and Kerr, 1982: 47).

This woman judged her wages to be good. Since filleting is the most highly skilled job for women in fish plants, it commanded higher wages than, for example, washing fish. She also notes all the women worked, resulting in a relatively good income for the village. And working twenty hours in a row when one is paid by the hour, even without overtime pay, would result in a high money income for that period of time. The testimony of other women reveals that many thought they were paid poorly. However, in a way, it becomes relative, relative to the options available and to the other activities pursued by women to support themselves and their families. Wages had to be placed in the

context of overall subsistence activities. Cannery work allowed them to pursue other, non-monetary means of earning their livelihood. However, cannery work was essential because some form of wage income had become necessary to supplement other subsistence activities. When that source of money income disappeared, other income sources were also gone and the native economy was no longer sufficient to support the population. State social assistance filled the gap.

Klemtu cannery, located on the central coast, closed in 1968, having operated for approximately 40 years. Brenda Assu recalled how people used to congregate at Cassiar cannery, located on the Skeena river in the north, from Kitwanga, Kitsegeucula, Hazelton and probably Kispiox (Skogan, 1983; 37). Cassiar was the only operating cannery left in the early 1980s, its future in doubt since it had gone into receivership. Sunnyside on the Skeena, was built in 1916, closing in 1969. Mabel Ridley recalled how people came to work from upriver, from Kitkatla, Port Simpson, Hartley Bay, and Kitimat. Most of them worked in the cannery all their lives. In addition to being a cannery worker, she was also a midwife.

I learned these things [midwifery] from my mother and my sister. At Sunnyside, when they first call me, I stay up all night maybe til the hard labour starts and the baby is born sometimes at five or six in the morning. Then I go to my house and tend to my own family and go to work. I was floor lady at Sunnyside for twenty years (Skogan, 1983: 38).

Elizabeth Spalding began to work in 1916, when she was eight years old. Her mother was afraid to walk from the reserve to Port Essington (on the Skeena) by herself, so she took her daughter. She brought a box for her to stand on, and the women showed her how to do the work. She's

been in the industry almost 60 years. She recalled Japanese women working there, with their babies strapped to their backs. "We don't know what rest is when we're young. When there's lots of fish we just quit for two hours to sleep then work again. After a while we were paid around fifty dollars a ticket, but now they make real lots of money. Cheap in my time" (Skogan, 1983: 63-64).

Finally, Leona Sparrow recorded the life histories of her paternal grandparents, both of whom were Salish (Fraser river area). Rose Sparrow also remembered Japanese women working in the canneries with their small babies strapped to their backs, while older children were kept in boxes in the corners of the cannery, where the women could keep an eye on them. Native women generally had either an older daughter or a grandmother to care for young children. Rose's twelve-year old daughter looked after the children, one of whom was born at a Skeena river cannery. Rose left work at eight and the baby was born four hours later. She was allowed to return home to breast feed the baby because their home was close to the plant (Sparrow, 1976: 93-94).

"Cheap in my time" is perhaps a fitting epitaph. An attempt has been made here to demonstrate how the native economy was transformed but not destroyed when capitalists began to prosecute the provincial fisheries. The more general argument is that industrial capitalists will attempt to pay labour power below the costs necessary to its costs of production and reproduction. They can do this if pre-capitalist relations of production continue within capitalism and if structured inequality exists. The latter serves to split the working class into organised workers who seek wages to cover their own and their

dependents' costs of production and reproduction, and those groups disadvantaged along a variety of dimensions. Up until the second world war, native people, Chinese, Japanese and East Indian peoples were all considered to be non-people by the state. While European male workers used political means to achieve economic gains, these groups were invisible politically. The implications of these historic, non-capitalist divisions are that Marx's concept of the value of labour power as uniformly determined (thus reduced to a single figure in any one period of time) must be revised. The value of labour power is determined not only in the economic marketplace but also in the course of class struggle. Where structured inequality predates capitalist relations, advantaged groups within and outside class relations will use distinctions like gender and race in class struggle with capitalist employers.

¹ The term clan is used here in a very loose fashion, to mean a group larger than the basic economic unit or house group but smaller than the tribe. Many, but not all, of these groups shared a common place of residence for part of the year. A loose equivalent is community. Difficulty in using precise terminology stems from the wide diversity of groups covered in this analysis.

² Within the anthropological literature, there has been debate over the potlatch, its uses and meanings. Many anthropologists have demonstrated the purpose of the potlatch in conferring rank, status, and power. See, for example, the collection of essays on the subject in McFeat (1978, 72-133). Wolf (1982: 190) also stresses the importance of the potlatch in both social stratification (creation of an "aristocracy") and establishing kinship ties. There is another body of anthropological work, however, that began to explore the meaning of the potlatch not as an institution through which titles are allocated and alliances formed (a stratification system), but as a socioeconomic system for redistributing resources (especially food). Now the two purposes need not be contradictory. In what follows, attention is given the second interpretation because it provides a framework for understanding the northwest coast as an economic unit of production and redistribution.

³ Wolf (1982: 190-192) appears to miss the importance of this temporal shift by treating the potlatch as if it were one uniform social practice. The potlatches he describes occurred during the fur trade period.

⁴ The chiefs thus used their pivotal positions in the fur trade to accumulate potlatch wealth, to augment their affinal connections through auspicious marriages, to extend their trading networks, and to reinforce their social prerogatives. Some chiefs used the labor of their slaves to increase the production of wealth objects. The basic deployment of social labor in the societies of the northwest coast nevertheless remained predicated on the kinship mode (Wolf, 1982: 188-189, emphasis added).

⁵ The details on the fur trade presented here are taken from Fisher's Contact and Conflict (1980).

⁶ The Indian agent for Fraser River blamed the Chinese merchants for selling brandy to the Indians (DIA, 1884: 45). The Cowichan Indian agent complained the Victoria Indians "seem to have all the vices of the whites" (DIA, 1883: 55). The agent for Coquitlam noted a Chinese had

been convicted for keeping young Indian women in New Westminster for prostitution (DIA, 1883: 61).

⁷Most of the history published on the fishing industry gives primacy of place to the Chinese as the first employees inside salmon canneries. However, a reading of the reports of the Indian agents during the 1870s and 1880s indicates that perhaps native people were first used in many of the salmon canneries in British Columbia. Here is an area that requires much closer investigation by B.C. historians.

⁸This information was kindly provided by informants in Prince Rupert and Steveston, who showed us seniority lists and identified the racial and ethnic origins of the employees, allowing us to devise rough estimates. In Prince Rupert, the oldest and most senior women in one of the salmon canneries were native (a number had been there thirty to forty years). The most junior women were Portuguese and East Indian (this seemed to hold for all fish plants, canneries and fresh fish).

CHAPTER 5

Transformation of Chinese and Japanese Peasants into Contract Labourers

A salmon canner's chief concern, one directly connected to the realisation of profit, was having a cheap and adequate supply of labourers on hand to process an erratic and seasonal catch. Realisation of surplus was connected to extraction of surplus labour and to payment of wages below costs of production and reproduction of labour power. Native peoples had been engaged in fishing and processing for the fur trading companies, and continued to be engaged by salmon canners.¹ Coastal peoples migrated seasonally and their economy centred around fishing. With the encroachment of white settlement and the creation of reserves, ability to subsist solely from fishing, hunting and gathering was curtailed. Cannery offered wages and these became incorporated into the old economic patterns. Now villages included a sojourn at a cannery as part of their annual migration. Subsistence activities rooted in a fishing, hunting, gathering mode of production continued apace, although they were increasingly limited by the encroaching capitalist mode of production developing in the province. At the same time, native peoples struggled with capitalists, settlers and various colonial and state bureaucrats over rights to land and resources. The clash between the

two modes of production resulted in a changed, but not an obliterated, native economy.

Salmon canners could pay native people cheap wages, especially the women and children working inside their plants, but they were not able to subordinate this labour force. The very factor enabling employers to pay cheap wages, partial reliance on means of subsistence lying outside the capitalist economy, allowed labourers to exercise a measure of choice and independence. And the continued battle over rights and ownership over fishing sites resulted in confrontations between canners and native groups, mediated by state agents.

The core of the cannery labour force was found elsewhere. Salmon canners used the labour of a group totally separated from its means of subsistence, but only partially proletarianised because its relations of production were rooted in a pre-capitalist mode of production. Chinese contractors entered into an employment relationship with canners on behalf of the employees actually working in the canneries. These contractors took on the burden of hiring, retaining and disciplining the work force necessary to process the season's catch at individual canneries. The salmon canners dealt with these individual contractors rather than with the entire labour force. Contractors were generally paid by the case (a number of variations to this system existed, since each canner negotiated separately, but the general pattern was as described here). The contractors had to pay their labourers from this sum. The uncertainties inherent in a fluctuating supply of fish were thus passed from the canners to the contractors. In turn, the contractors passed these on to their labourers. They provisioned the

Chinese crews, and, in poor seasons, often cut back on food supplied to the workers. The process whereby this system was adopted in the B.C. fishing industry forms the subject of this chapter.

After the Chinese contract system was in place, Japanese came to be hired by a similar process. Japanese immigration came later, towards the end of the nineteenth century. While Chinese men were hired to work inside the canneries, Japanese men were hired as fishers. It was not until the end of the first decade of this century that Japanese men began to bring their wives over from Japan, and the women subsequently were employed to work inside the plants.

Origins of Chinese Cannery Workers

Chinese immigration to Canada began in 1858 (Wickberg, 1982: 5). Most came to British Columbia by way of the United States, primarily from California and the city of San Francisco, where the first China town in North America was established. Originally, they were miners who followed the gold rush, to California in 1848 and to the Fraser river in 1858, men who laboured on their own account. "Subsequently, however, large numbers of Chinese came directly from China, especially between 1881 and 1885 when the Canadian Pacific Railway was constructed" (Bolaria and Li, 1985: 82).

Chinese migrants came predominantly from the southern coastal province of Guangdong and the neighbouring coastal province of Fujian. Both areas were in the van of western efforts to break down the cultural and commercial barriers surrounding China from the early nineteenth century. Canton, the Guangdong provincial capital, was the point of contact with European commerce before the disastrous First Opium War in 1839...It was through the original treaty ports in Guangdong and Fujian and the British and Portuguese possessions of Hong Kong and Macau that Chinese went abroad.

...The overwhelming majority of Chinese migrants to Canada have come from a small area of eight contiguous counties in the heart of the Canton delta...(Wickberg, 1982: 7).

The first Europeans known to have established trade with China were the Portuguese, who came to China in the sixteenth century. They developed a network of exchange involving three continents, Europe, China and South America. The Chinese state was insular, and generally hostile to foreign trade. Government officials tended to confine traders to coastal ports. Canton emerged as an important port, with a resulting impact on the surrounding countryside in Guangdong province. The peasantry began to specialise in the production of sugar, textiles, porcelain and metal wares. These were exchanged for tobacco, sweet potatoes and peanuts, cultivated in South America. The foods were adopted into the peasantry's diet, and prosperity from foreign trade led to an increase in the size of the population (Wolf, 1982: 256).

In 1644, there was a change in dynasty, resulting in a tightening of imperial control over foreign trade. The Manchus were alien rulers who had a difficult time legitimating their power. While they despised foreign traders, they needed the gold and silver coming into China. In 1757 they decreed that Canton was to be the only port open to foreign trade. Trade was controlled by a group of merchant firms called the Cohong. When Canton became the only port open to this trade, they acquired a monopoly over it. The emperor charged the Cohong with regulating the activities of foreign traders in China (Chan, 1983: 22-23).

China enjoyed a favourable balance of trade largely through European demand for tea. In 1644, the Dutch introduced the beverage to

England. The Manchu dynasty fell shortly thereafter, and the emperor re-established foreign trade. By this time, England was the chief trading company, but it continued to deal mainly with the port of Canton. While European demand for tea was great, there was no equivalent good demanded by the Chinese. The British therefore had to pay for Chinese products with silver, leading to a drain from Europe and from the silver mines of Mexico, controlled by the British. Wolf estimates that, between 1719 and 1813, one-fifth of all the silver produced in Mexico and about the same amount from European silver stocks ended in China. China became the "tomb of American treasure" (Wolf, 1982: 255). In searching for articles desired by the Chinese, the Europeans had discovered the high prices fetched by sea otter skins, and the native coastal population of North America was drawn into the trade network controlled by European colonisers.

In 1776, the American revolution cut England off from its silver supplies in Mexico. In 1773, the East India Company had established a monopoly over the sale of opium, and the British introduced it in China. Opium addiction burgeoned in China, and the balance of payments shifted, with silver now leaving China.

The outflow of silver from China soon affected the country at large. The government set tax quotas in silver, the peasants paid in copper cash. As silver grew scarce and rose in price, ever larger amounts of copper were required to meet taxes. Opium thus did more than undermine the health of Chinese addicts; it began to subvert the social order in the countryside. (Wolf, 1982: 258)

The peasantry in southern China was hit especially hard, since it had profited from foreign trade. As the balance shifted to England, taxation increased. Along with opium, the British sought to establish

markets for their manufactured products, such as textiles.² These flooded into China at prices textile producers in Canton could not match. While the Portuguese had developed trade networks involving the exchange of goods between countries, the British were interested in creating markets for their manufactured products and supply centres in resources necessary to capitalist production at home. Thus, while the peasantry in southern China had benefited in the earlier trade networks, it was now disadvantaged. Instead of creating valued commodities, it was reduced to producing agricultural surpluses convertible into copper and silver. It received nothing in return. Earlier population growth now acted as a severe drain on the ability of the peasants to survive on the land. Many were forced to leave, and sought wage employment in Canton. But industries there were also depressed, and the eventual solution was emigration. However, emigration was prohibited between 1672 and 1858. Foreign pressure determined both its legalisation and its pattern.

The Chinese state resisted both England's attempt to colonise the country and the introduction of opium. The result was the Opium War, begun in 1838 when the British navy sank three Chinese gunboats. In 1842, a defeated China was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanjing. "The impact of Western military and economic invasion was to disrupt the feudal autonomous system in China and replace it with a neocolonial structure" (Li, 1979: 322). One of the immediate consequences was that Canton lost its privileged position, now that other ports were engaged in trade with Europe. Foreign penetration was matched by internal disintegration of dynastic control over warlords. As warlords fought

with one another and with the state for control of various parts of the Chinese empire, the peasantry had to finance the wars through increased taxation (Wickberg, 1982: 9). Oppression resulted in a series of peasant revolts, the most famous occurring in 1850, the Taiping Rebellion. The Qing dynasty, with foreign aid, eventually crushed it in 1864, with a loss of an estimated twenty million lives (Chan, 1983: 35). One of the provinces involved was Guangdong. In addition to all of these disasters, the area experienced, from 1848 to 1850, a severe drought. The result of all of these forces was the uprooting of a huge peasant population, which could no longer subsist on the land. "The penetration of foreign capitalism in China accelerated the breakdown of the Chinese economy. On the one hand, it destroyed the local handicraft industries in villages and cities, and replaced them with a commodity market; while on the other hand, it drove many peasants and handicraftsmen to bankruptcy, and produced a large pool of surplus labour" (Bolaria and Li, 1985: 83). One solution chosen by peasants was emigration.

Johnson and Wickberg (Wickberg, 1982: 5) note that Chinese emigration was of two forms: coolie broker and chain migration. Most Chinese emigrants were single men. The Chinese contract system was an extension of the first form. Immigration involved a debt relation to a broker who paid the passage fare from China. The immigrant was indebted to the broker and was not free to seek employment on his own until the debt was repaid. "Passage loans were often made by Chinese clan associations established in California, known as the "six companies,"

and later by capitalist employers such as the railroads who recruited for labor in China" (Boswell, 1986: 358).

Mention has been made of the Cohong merchants of Canton, who controlled foreign trade until the Opium war. The merchant class, in China as well as in Japan, occupied an inferior position, well below artisans and peasants, and certainly below the scholar-gentry. Merchants' status rose in proportion as capitalist development took hold. In the meantime, however, they continued to act as middlemen between the Chinese economy and the nascent capitalism overseas. When their monopoly over trade goods leaving Canton was broken, the merchant class in Canton turned to supplying labourers for the plantations in Hawaii, Cuba, the West Indies and South America. The trade, being illegal, involved forceful abduction of Chinese peasants, and, in this sense, the coolie trade was similar to the system of slavery it displaced. However, it was short-lived. Slavery was abolished in America in 1808, although it did not end until 1865, following the end of the Civil War. The coolie system flourished briefly when the slave trade dried up, but it also came to an end when the Chinese state made emigration legal. To be effective, however, the countries importing labourers also had to put a stop to abuses. In the 1870's Spain and Portugal agreed to regulate Chinese immigration. The United States chose a different tactic. Just as England had wanted to open China as a market for its goods and a supplier of raw materials for its industries, so the United States wanted to open China as a source of labour supply. It achieved its end in 1868, with the signing of the Burlingame treaty. Henceforth, Chinese were to be allowed to migrate freely. A most-

favoured-nation clause included Britain and its former colonies within the terms of the treaty. These series of events ended the coolie system in that peasants were no longer forcibly and illegally transported from China. But the system of contracting cheap labour in China to meet demand in America, continued.

The contract labor system demanded more accountability than the coolie traffic (which saw hundreds of indentured workers die of scurvy, malnutrition or flogging en route to the New World), if for no reason other than that the investment outlay was greater. The worker's value was also considerably higher because he had signed on by choice and was travelling as a free emigrant. After 1870, the contract type of labor was the only legal way a Chinese laborer could work in British colonies and former colonies. (Chan, 1983: 45)

As stated earlier, most Chinese immigrants to North America in the nineteenth century came from eight contiguous countries in the vicinity of Canton. In the 1870's they chose their destination, but they often had little choice in terms of being forced to leave China. Many had incurred debts of various kinds, and even more had difficulty subsisting, being close to starvation. The "six companies" controlled emigration. "As a conduit of low-paid labor and a coercive collector of debts, the "six companies" functioned as middlemen in the interests of the capitalist class" (Boswell, 1986: 358). Boswell also argues that the companies acted as an unofficial arm of the state "by enforcing contracts and "policing Chinese behavior." The peasants had to work for an agreed period of time for these contractors in order to clear their debts. Most planned to return to China rich men. They left their families behind, planning to ease poverty at home with remittances from pay cheques abroad. But a whole system of indebtedness developed between the labourer and his wages, marked by the establishment of a

class of merchants and agents abroad, connected to the merchant class resident in China. The Chinese left from Canton, and all of them passed through Hong Kong on their way overseas. The appointment of consuls provided a connection for Chinese merchant contractors, since many of the consuls were involved in the trade in labour. The United States held an inquiry into Chinese immigration in 1876, and some of the evidence collected was appended to the Canadian Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, published in 1885.

The testimony of a San Francisco merchant, Thomas H. King, who resided for ten years in China, was active in the Consul's office in Hong Kong, and assisted the placement of Chinese on ships leaving for North America, provides some clues as to how the system worked. Apparently the laws of the United States government enabled the Consul to exact fees from each labourer. Nearly all of them, except for a few boys and Chinese returning to California, appeared to be under contract. The contract bound them for three to five years, but few of them appeared to know the conditions of their labour overseas. Part of the contract stipulated that they would be cared for if sick, and would be sent back to China at the expiration of their contract, or their bodies would be shipped back if they died. Money advanced to cover the cost of the voyage had to be repaid with interest running as high as five per cent per month. The contractors also arranged for wages to be remitted to family in China, and this led to further abuse. He claimed all sailing vessels to China had conditions in their charters stipulating no labourers were to be taken except those supplied by the companies. Although force was not exerted, many peasants came unwillingly, to clear

debts or to support family and friends at home or to better their own condition. The contractors at the San Francisco end were originally agents of Chinese firms in Hong Kong, connected in turn to firms in Canton. The companies in San Francisco were known as the "Six Companies," representing the six districts around Canton where labourers were recruited (Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, 1885: 188-89).

The companies appear to have been a curious combination of profit-making business and benevolent association. The Chinese peasant knew no English and had no means of disposing of his labour power in America. Contractors acted as middlemen between capitalists in search of labour and the peasant requiring work. And their influence over the peasants did not stem solely from a debt relationship. It was rooted in the pre-capitalist relations found in China before European contact. Chan, in Gold Mountain, argues convincingly that Confucianism and the class structure in China had patterned a hierarchy of authority modified by the merchant class to suit conditions in North America. The Confucian system of values placed central importance on the family. The family (including ancestors) represented a microcosm of society, and both were ordered in a rigid structure of authority.

The grandfather, typically the oldest living male, governed a patriarchal hierarchy that stressed the subordination of the son to the father, wife to the husband, younger brother to the older brother and in civil society, the subject to the ruler...

The authority of the oldest male adult, whose central purpose was to enrich the family and enhance its prosperity, gave him almost total control over the destiny of his immediate household and families related by kinship as well as those with clan ties. (Chan, 1983: 100-101)

As demonstrated earlier, the wider economic and political fabric of Chinese society, especially in the south, was disintegrating in the latter part of the nineteenth century. But family and kin ties persisted. The peasantry, as Wolf (1969) demonstrates in his Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, could be a very conservative force. The motive of many peasants in emigrating was to help their family, and most planned to return. The object of Chinese peasants in emigrating was to pay off debts and ease economic constraints on their families in China. The merchant class developed a middleman position between economic activities in the two countries, China and Canada. But it established its power over the peasantry by founding associations familiar to it. For example, merchants did not simply loan peasants fare overseas but also guaranteed the return of their bodies to China if they died before returning. The labour contracts often included such clauses. Thus, a relationship sprang up between the two classes that originated in capitalist demand for cheap labour, but that preserved ties that had been developed for centuries in China.

Another factor facilitating the development of such a relationship was the racism encountered by the Chinese in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Capitalists used Chinese labour because it was cheaper than any other labour force available to it.³ The Chinese peasant subsisted close to the margins of starvation in China and he travelled alone. Thus, his needs were marginal, well below standards the white male working class had achieved. A central argument of this thesis is that the "free" labourer must be supported outside capitalist relations of production. The merchant class provided that

support, at levels close to those labourers were accustomed to in China, in a peasant economy existing close to the margins of subsistence, one in which starvation and death were not infrequent occurrences. In fact, a chief clause in labour contracts negotiated with salmon canners was the provisioning of the crew by the contractor. And the contractor could undercut the price of any other labour force by recouping potential losses through food supplied to his crews. Capitalist employers had an interest in the system, since it provided them with a cheap labour force. But the white working class was threatened by such a system, and the hostility was expressed in racist hatred towards Chinese as a race, not as exploited workers.⁴ Again this worked to the advantage of the capitalist. The only reason for encouraging Chinese immigration, as employers stated repeatedly in the various commissions held on the subject, was the ability and willingness of the Chinese to labour at wages refused by white male labourers. An equally important reason was the lack of European female and child labour.

A few Chinese women did come to North America in the second half of the nineteenth century. Most of them were prostitutes, especially the first Chinese women who emigrated. While the forcible abduction of Chinese peasants ended with the coolie system, women continued to be sold into slavery, to work as prostitutes.⁵ The patriarchal nature of the Confucian system relegated women to an extremely low status. When peasants found it difficult to survive, female babies were frequently killed to reduce the number of mouths to feed. Chan (1983: 82) notes, "women were expendable from the day of their birth...Women in China served no useful purpose except as sexual objects, baby makers or beasts

of burden." Gendered division of labour in this patriarchal society devalued work performed by women and served to structure inequality between the sexes. While male peasants began to be treated as individuals, women continued to be bought and sold as commodities, fetching prices ranging from \$500 to \$2,500, for the San Francisco prostitution trade.

The "cribs," each of which held up to six women, were slatted crates, often located out of doors, measuring approximately 12 feet by 14 feet with a curtain, pallet, wash basin, mirror and usually two chairs. A woman forced into crib prostitution would work for six to eight years; at the end of her usefulness, when she was ravaged by disease, physical abuse or starvation, she was allowed to escape to the Salvation Army, the hospital or the gutter. Typically, she would be dead within six months. (Chan, 1983:81)

Prostitution was also handled through Chinese merchant companies, and there is some evidence that women acted as merchants in the trade. King, testifying at the 1876 commission in San Francisco, referred to them as "bawds." However, they appear to have been linked to prostitution in China, advancing money to prostitutes, who came under contracts similar to those of male labourers (Royal Commission, 1885: 192). Many of those forcibly abducted were young girls, not more than thirteen years old, as well as boys. Prostitution was not the monopoly of the Chinese. Fur traders had transformed the sexual independence of native women in this direction, the commodification of sexual relations. Women were also brought over from Europe and the eastern United States, but they appear to have exercised more choice than did most Chinese women. In the male-dominated society of the Pacific north-west, it is indicative of structured gender inequality that the largest group of non-native women was originally engaged as prostitutes, many of them

sold into the trade. Their proportion of the total non-native female population began to decline when settlers established families in the area. However, as in the case of the Chinese peasant who went from forced abduction to unwilling cheap labour, so most white women also had little choice when they had to work except to labour for cheap wages. This argument will be developed at the close of the chapter, after more evidence has been presented.

Racism

The European working class, settlers and municipal and provincial officials all protested against employment of Chinese workers. Commissions were held in both the United States and Canada as politicians attempted, first to limit, and then to abolish Chinese immigration. The major defendants of continued immigration were the capitalists, and the reasons they gave for their need of cheap labour illustrates the interrelationship between gender and race in structuring cheap labour forces under capitalism. The universal reason put forward by capitalists for employing Chinese men was the absence of white women and children. And Boswell (1986: 359) notes: "The Chinese were particularly welcomed in positions that the white miners (who were almost all male) considered female work, such as cooking, housekeeping, or laundry."

Colonel F. A. Bee, consul for the Chinese government, explained the Pacific states had embarked on capitalism when civil war broke out in 1860. Their sources of supply from the east were broken, forcing them to become self-reliant. Previously raw material had been sent east for

processing, but now industries were established to process them on site. In the eastern United States (and central Canada), women were employed in these manufactures; for example, boots and shoes, clothing, underwear, cigars, matches (Palmer, 1983). But women were not available in California, and employers hired Chinese men in their place (Royal Commission, 1885: 16-17). However, in the patriarchal nuclear family, women were subordinated to men and did not generally aspire to improve their position. Whereas subordination of European women had taken centuries, the position Chinese labourers found themselves in was recent. As several politicians complained, the Chinese proved to be "too good" at their work. Sir Matthew Begbie, Chief Justice for British Columbia, summarised the problem.

The Chinaman is in every respect the reverse of an European, except that he is a man ... Yet they as evidently despise all our attainments and ways; and, what is most annoying, they come here and beat us on our own ground in supplying our own wants. They are inferior, too, in weight and size of muscle, and yet they work more steadily and with better success on the average than white men. (Royal Commission, 1885: 70)

The white male working class feared the Chinese labourers because they were prepared to accept wages well below white male standards. In times of high unemployment, the white male working class saw the employment of Chinese as taking jobs away from it. An example was given in Chapter 3 of how employers used Chinese labourers as strike breakers, further undermining the condition of the organised working class. But there is evidence that capitalists also feared the Chinese.

The president of the Immigration Association of San Francisco, A. R. Briggs, maintained several industries were controlled by Chinese capitalists; for example, the manufacturing of cigars. Originally

employed as cheap labour, they learned the manufacturing processes. A few managed to accumulate capital and invested in their own factories. Raising necessary capital would, of course, be facilitated by connections with the Chinese merchant community at home and abroad. Briggs asserted they dominated cigar manufacturing in California. "That is to say, cigars are made almost wholly by Chinese workmen, and many of the factories are in the hands of Chinese, and owned by them. They do the same thing in tin-ware, boots and shoes, and clothing" (Royal Commission, 1885: 7).

The capitalist mode of production established in the Pacific northwest was imported from England. The Europeans encountered a large native population whom they eventually managed to contain, killing off large numbers and restricting the rest on reservations and reserves. There remained the problem of creating an indigenous working class. The European working class consisted of single males who quickly managed to become either commodity producers working for themselves or to command high wages when working for others. The solution would eventually involve the creation of large urban centres dominated by immigrants from Western Europe, but, in the interim, capitalists built up their industries by using Chinese labour. Politicians and settlers promoting immigration of women and children from Europe complained that it was difficult to induce white women to come when the jobs they could do were filled with Chinese workers. Even domestic labour, the epitome of "women's work," was dominated by the Chinese. While European women had ties to family institutions and cultural practices developed in feudal Europe, the Chinese labourers were connected to the merchant class and

kin relations in China. And the developing merchant community in North America, Hong Kong, and China was becoming powerful, developing a network of circulation of capital from one country to another. European capitalists, workers, and politicians were threatened by such developments.

Capitalists could be Chinese just as well as European. However, territorial control was vested with Europeans, and the state was charged with ensuring that indigenous industries would be controlled by Europeans. Britain had conquered China as well as North America, and colonialism guaranteed ultimate political as well as economic control for white men. The economic relationships involved in the capitalist mode of production are neither sexist nor racist in or of themselves. However, when consideration is given to the manner in which the capitalist mode of production was established, first in England (where sexism prevailed), then in the rest of the world, through military conquest involving racist rationales for dominating foreign peoples, the inherent sexist and racist nature of capitalism becomes apparent. Both sexism and racism are required if one group (white men) is to retain economic and political power in the world economy, and if cheap labour underlies economic wage relationships.

The Chinese Contract System in the B.C. Salmon Canning Industry

The first salmon canner employed Chinese labour in 1872, at Eagle Cliff near Portland, Oregon.⁶ Canning on the Fraser can be dated at 1867, when James Symes experimented in his saltery (Stacey, 1982: 2). The only piece of machinery used was a large iron kettle to boil the tin

cans. Native fishers had been supplying salmon to the Hudson's Bay Company forts for many decades, and continued to supply canners. And since the manner of preserving the salmon by salting and curing was originally an extension of native processes, the first labourers employed within the canneries may have been native. Once the industry became big business, however, a different type of labour force was required, one guaranteed to remain in place as long as supplies of the raw material lasted. A subordinated work force was needed, and, for the reasons outlined in Chapter 4, the native population did not meet the requirements. The Honourable Justice Crease stated:

The Indians could not be depended upon at first on account of their numbers, which in those days were threatening, nor afterwards on account of their restless, nomadic propensities, which prevented them from settling down to any permanent, industrious avocations. (Royal Commission, 1885: 142)

Native labour continued to be used. Native fishers continued to supply the resource, although, especially in the south, they eventually had to compete with European and Japanese fishers. And native women and children were employed in the canneries to clean fish and in various supplementary tasks (children, for example, wiped cans). But the central tasks were given to Chinese men. As demonstrated, most of these men were of peasant background, with few skills directly applicable to processing fish in factories, unlike native people. But, unlike the latter group, they were a subordinated labour force. They had no other means of subsistence except through jobs provided by contractors. They also had little else to do except work. Their friends and families were in China. Racist exclusion prevented them from becoming involved in the social and cultural activities of the larger society. Language barriers

were another liability. China towns did develop, first in Victoria and later in Vancouver, providing some form of community life. But most of these men were poor, alone, and planning to return to China. They therefore had little option but to work, and work hard.

Originally hired because they were a reliable and cheap labour force, they eventually became a highly skilled one. As mentioned, the first salmon canneries were operated as experiments. But, as the industry grew, certain functions became crucial to the overall operation; for example, butchering the fish, cooking it, making the cans, testing cans for defects. The Chinese labour force became expert in these various tasks. From the start, canneries were organised as assembly lines. An individual repeated the same job continuously, although the jobs themselves could be rotated depending on the volume of fish to be processed. Some tasks were performed by native people in one cannery, and by Chinese in another; for example, filling cans. The native labour force was proportionately larger in the north, due to the costs of transporting Chinese crews from Victoria and Vancouver. But within specific canneries, groups were segregated along gender and racial lines. Chinese men worked together on certain tasks, while others were assigned exclusively to native women. Further divisions prevailed among the native labour forces, with women from one village working together in a group. This pattern of jobs segregated by race and gender still prevails. It made trade union organisation, begun in the late 1930s by fishers' unions, especially difficult. Workers tended to identify with their own gender and racial or ethnic affiliation. Employers had structured the labour force along these lines, and sought

to keep workers from uniting. Union organisation forms the topic of Chapter 7.

All of the provincial salmon canneries came to rely on a core of expert Chinese workers. And most used the Chinese contract system.⁷ In the two royal commissions held to investigate immigration of, first the Chinese, and then also the Japanese, whose reports were published in 1885 and 1902, salmon canners and others affirmed over and over again that, without the Chinese, the provincial salmon canning industry could not have developed.

In 1884, the permanent Chinese population of New Westminster was 300, but it swelled to between 1200 and 1500 hundred during the fishing season, when Chinese labourers came from Oregon, Washington state, California and Victoria to work in the plants. A member of parliament residing in New Westminster stated:

I have been informed by Chinamen themselves that they give bonds, before leaving China, to Chinese companies to work for them for a term of from five to ten years, and all that the Company have to do in order to carry out their part of the contract is to furnish them with the bare necessities of life and their clothing, and the Company have all their earnings. After they serve their time, of course they go then and work for themselves and make as much money as they possibly can and go back to China as quickly as possible. (Royal Commission, 1885: xxv)

Another member of parliament explained: "If you require 1,000 Chinamen to perform a particular work, you do not apply to individual Chinamen, or insert an advertisement in the newspapers in order to attract men from all sections of the country, but you go to one of these Chinese companies, and make arrangements with them" (ibid.:xxxi). By 1900, an estimated 6000 Chinese were employed in provincial canneries. Bell-Irving testified on behalf of A.B.C., the English syndicate owning

canneries on the Fraser River, two on the Skeena and one on Rivers Inlet. In 1900, the six canneries on the Fraser employed from 700 to 1200 hundred inside workers (this indicates the tremendous variation resulting from a fluctuating supply of fish). Of the 1200, 180 were white, 300 were Indian women and the rest were Chinese. A cannery on Skeena River employed 75 Chinese, 25 white men and 75 Indians (men and women). The cannery on Rivers Inlet employed 90 Chinese and 90 Indians (men and women) (Royal Commission, 1902: 143 and 145).

There is evidence that the Chinese, although a subordinated labour force, were not passive. For example, after the provincial government attempted to pass an act levying a labour tax on Chinese in Victoria, all of the Chinese servants, in 1878, employed in that city went on strike. The act was disallowed by the federal government. Briggs noted that, in San Francisco, when Chinese labourers began to realise the value of their labour they tended to organise "very much as the whites do in trade organisations, and strikes among those people are as frequent and as arbitrary as among the whites" (Royal Commission, 1885:8). After the turn of the century, head taxes and other state regulations were cutting back the number of Chinese allowed into the country. And the proliferation of canneries, as well as the resulting competition, led to a demand and scarcity for Chinese workers, resulting in their ability to command higher wages. But the skill component was only acknowledged after the turn of the century. In the beginning, Chinese were employed because they worked cheaply and because white men refused to do that type of work.

A fishery commission was held in the early 1890s, and a number of canners described the mechanics of the contract system. F. L. Lord, owner of Wadham's cannery, testified that Chinese contractors also employed native women. He had travelled to the Columbia River canneries, and asserted he had never seen a white man employed in the type of work done by the Chinese, "a white man would starve to death" (B.C. Fishery Commission Report, 1892: 178). Rithet testified that the salmon canning business could not have been carried on without Chinese labour. It was impossible to obtain white labour for such a short period of time and the work itself did not require "able bodied men"; it could be done by Chinese, women and boys (*ibid.*: 275).

The Chinese contract system persisted until around 1949, when it was gradually replaced by negotiated union agreements (in a modified form it has continued into the 1980s). Legislation introduced during the Second World War required employers to place workers on payrolls and record individual wages. This rendered the contract system obsolete, since canners paid one lump sum to the contractor. In the 1980's, a contractor employed by B. C. Packers in Prince Rupert described his former job. "My job was a labour contractor - to supply all the labour and be in charge of cannery production. Got paid by the case. No, you didn't have to be Chinese to work for the contractor. My father hired Indians too. Local people ... My job was to look after all the processing and make sure they did it right" (Skogan, 1983: 76).

Canners did not hire individual workers. Contractors gave advances to the crews hired, called "China gangs." The core of the labour force, the skilled men, were hired for the season. Other labourers, especially

native people, were hired as required. Native women were paid by the hour or by the piece (for example, when they worked filling cans or mending nets). The native workers looked after their own food supplies, but the Chinese "bosses," sent to supervise the labour gangs, arranged provisions for the men, hiring a cook for them. The costs of provisions were charged out of the men's wages. When the salmon pack was light, contractors often sought to avoid losses by cutting back on the number of meals served or by charging the Chinese workers extra for food and other necessities (Royal Commission, 1902: 135). The canners supplied accommodation. The men were housed in bunkhouses, usually in very overcrowded conditions and with primitive facilities. The Japanese men were housed separately, also in bunkhouses (except in the case of fishers travelling with families, but this was a later development). White employees enjoyed the best facilities, often separate cottages, on yet another part of the cannery grounds. Finally, the native population camped in their own groups, in tents or accommodation provided by the canners. Several families were often housed in two or three bedroom cottages.

By the turn of the century, the provincial Chinese and Japanese population was concentrated in the fishing industry. The Chinese Board of Trade of Victoria estimated that, out of a total of 3263 Chinese labourers in that city, 886 were cannery men, the largest category (the second highest number, 638, was employed in miscellaneous labour while an additional 530 were domestic cooks and servants employed by whites) (Royal Commission, 1902: 12). The fishing industry employed an estimated 20,000 workers, 10,000 in work around and inside the plants.

Of the 10,000, 6000 were Chinese. "The process of canning (making cans, filling, cooking, soldering and boxing) is almost exclusively done by contract. The contracts are made with boss Chinamen who hire their own help in their own way."

The advantages to the canner are: First, the contractor takes the responsibility of employing sufficient hands to do the work thereby saving all the inconvenience and trouble which would otherwise fall upon the employer; second, the work is done by experts who have been trained to the business; third, the canner knows exactly what "the processions" will cost per case; fourth, any loss falls upon the contractor; fifth, he avoids the trouble of furnishing supplies, and the expenses of providing accommodation suitable for white men; sixth, the Chinese boss is able to get more work out of the men and to have it done more satisfactorily than when they work by the day for the cannery employer. (Ibid.: 135)

By the turn of the century, most canners acknowledged that if white men were to do the work, they would have to be trained. But Chinese labour was becoming scarce, as well as expert. The Automatic Can Company, located in New Westminster, and employing white workers (many of them boys), supplied only about one-tenth of the Fraser River supply. The company could probably manufacture cans more cheaply, other things being equal. But the canneries needed to secure skilled labour for the start of the season, and this was done by employing Chinese to make cans. As the cost was included in the cost per case given the contractor, it is entirely possible that the costs of making cans on site were lower than purchasing them. But as mentioned in Chapter 3, the major reason for maintaining can-making facilities was to secure an adequate supply of Chinese skilled labour for the coming season. The canners also began to replace manual operations with machinery, since they were no longer guaranteed an abundant supply of cheap labour. By 1900, machines had displaced an estimated fifty percent of the labour

force hired in individual plants. The overall labour force continued to climb for a few years because of the phenomenal salmon runs and continuing erection of canneries (until 1902). By using machines, cannery owners could lower the contract price per case. But the wages paid to individual Chinese workers rose. In addition, these men were in demand on Puget Sound (Ibid., testimony of Mar Chan, Chinese contractor: 141-142).

The first cannery began operations on Puget Sound in 1891, established by a Fraser River canner. A number of Fraser River cannery owners, seeking to escape fishery regulations in British Columbia, built canneries on the American side of the border. In the end, when American cannery owners took over, the process proved self-defeating. By 1896, there were 14 canneries in the area. Traps were legal on Puget Sound, but illegal on the Fraser. Fraser River cannery owners had to employ fishers, while their American counterparts could capture the resource far more cheaply using traps. Fish could also be kept alive in the traps for several days, thus allowing cannery owners to spread processing over a longer period of time. In addition, Puget Sound cannery owners had access to the American market, unlike their counterparts who were reliant on overseas markets demanding quality fish. A local U. S. market existed for the cheaper fall species, thus allowing a longer period of processing. Thus, machinery was cheaper, as were the costs of production, meaning Puget Sound cannery owners could pack more cheaply than Fraser River plants. A longer packing season gave a longer period of employment, making the southern plants more attractive to Chinese workers. And because the contract system was used there as well, overall labour costs were twenty

per cent lower than on Fraser River. The longer season allowed contractors to bid for smaller prices per case packed. On Puget Sound, canneries operated from the first of May to the end of November. On Fraser River, the average season lasted from four to eight weeks (*ibid.*: 153).

Two-thirds of the American plants were located close to urban centres, allowing canners access to yet another labour force, white women and children. Fraser River canneries were located seven to twelve miles from cities, meaning that most of the labour force had to live on site (*ibid.*: 165-166). The commissioners concluded that, although wages of individual Chinese workers were higher than in the past, the proportion of the total wage payroll going to Chinese workers was still very low. They also concluded enough Chinese were available to work in the salmon canneries, and restrictions on further immigration would not harm the industry.

By the turn of the century, European settlement had increased and the urban population had begun to grow rapidly. The population in Vancouver, incorporated in 1886, was only 2000 in 1886; 8000 in 1888; but escalated to 178,657 by 1901 (Adachi, 1976: 38). A new labour force was becoming available to do the work previously performed by native and Chinese workers. The number of white male workers increased, and they now had families. Women and children became available to work, but barriers to their hiring had been established. "The occupations which usually afford work for boys, girls and women are all occupied to a great extent by Chinese and Japanese, with the result that steady employment is largely closed to the youth of the country and to women

who have to seek employment of some kind to earn a living" (Royal Commission, 1902: 211).

It is rather ironic that the United States had forced China to agree to the free emigration of its population, for no sooner did immigrants begin to arrive than the American authorities were attempting to stop it. In 1881, a treaty was ratified between the two countries allowing the United States to limit the number of labourers entering from China. In 1884, emigration of Chinese labourers to the United States was suspended for ten years, and renewed for a further ten-year term in 1892, at which time resident Chinese were forced to register with the American authorities (ibid.: 249-250).

In British Columbia, a large number of Chinese labourers were required to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway. Once construction was completed, a series of head taxes were imposed on Chinese immigrants. In 1885, each immigrant had to pay \$50; in 1900, the amount was raised to \$100; and in 1903, to \$500. In 1875, the Chinese were denied the provincial vote (the native population was also disenfranchised). In 1895, the Japanese were included. The three groups won the right to vote only after the Second World War. While these various measures were designed to curtail immigration, the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 (also known as the exclusion act) stopped it altogether. The act was repealed in 1947 (Bolaria and Li, 1985: 86-87, 106). The provincial government had been passing laws to exclude the Chinese since the 1880's, but foreign diplomacy forced the federal government to repeal most of the provincial legislation.

Origins of Japanese Fishers

In the minds of most white people living in British Columbia at the turn of the century, there was little difference between the Chinese and the Japanese people. They were lumped together under the category "oriental," labourers accepting wages on which the white working class could not survive. However, when the Japanese began to immigrate, Chinese workers perceived them as a threat because Japanese contractors undercut the wages of Chinese as well as those of white workers. By the time the Japanese began to enter in large numbers, Chinese workers had been in the province for several decades. The two groups did not compete in the fishing industry, since Japanese men worked as fishers while Chinese men continued to labour inside the plants. Eventually, when Japanese fishers began to bring brides over from Japan, the women worked in the plants. But they tended to do jobs already assigned to women. They became expert filleters, and they also did manual can filling, a job paid by the piece. Apparently, many native women avoided this particular task on the Fraser, since they preferred hourly wages (for example, washing fish) (Sparrow, 1976: 132).

There are a number of similarities between events in Japan with those described for China, leading to emigration of the peasantry.⁸ Japan also closed its doors to foreign contact for several centuries. The Portuguese were also the first Europeans to visit Japan, in the sixteenth century. While merchant activity was also held in low regard by the ruling class, the Togugawa Shogunate, which came to power in 1603, feared the religious rather than the mercantile influence of the

foreigners. Out of an estimated population of between 15 and 20 million, by 1600, some 300,000 had become Catholic, due to the efforts of Portuguese and Spanish missionaries. In 1614, an edict was proclaimed banning Christianity and expelling the priests. It was followed, in 1624, by a ban on Spanish ships and traders, and the law was further tightened in 1638, when only Dutch traders were allowed to enter, and they were confined to a small island. In 1637, the death penalty was imposed on any Japanese trying to leave the country, or, having left, trying to enter. Some of the first Japanese to land on the B.C. coast were the products of ship wrecks, a common occurrence because limits were placed on tonnage in building boats, in an effort to limit distances travelled.

Isolation produced a period of peace and stability, marked by an increase in the size of the population. It ended in 1853, when Commodore Perry anchored a squadron at the mouth of Yedo Bay, forcing the Japanese to sign the Treaty of Kanagawa. American ships were to be allowed to trade at two ports, and a consul was to be appointed. Similar agreements soon followed with the British, Russians and Dutch. In 1876, the Togugawa Shogunate fell and the Meiji emperor was restored. The new state encouraged rapid industrialisation and westernisation. However, emigration was still illegal. In an action reminiscent of the Chinese coolie trade, in 1868, 153 Japanese were pirated to the Hawaiian Islands.

The Japanese state played a more direct role in emigration than did the Chinese. In 1884, Japan signed a convention with Hawaiian sugar plantation owners to import Japanese labourers under contract.

Legalisation of emigration soon followed, and, in 1885, the first group arrived in Honolulu, 943 farmers. Over the next nine years, 28,000 labourers reached Hawaii, employed on three-year contracts. By 1908, 178,927 of them entered Hawaii.

In 1877, Manzo Nagano arrived in British Columbia. He was a sailor and engaged in fishing on the Fraser River with an Italian partner. He was followed, in 1884, by 13 more, men who settled in New Westminster and Steveston. Immigration then began in earnest.

As in China, most immigrants were from the peasant class, and they came from the same area in Japan. A large community of Japanese fishers chose Steveston as their home and most of them came from the same small village, Mio, located in Wakayama prefecture. There, peasants and fishers had a difficult time subsisting. Labour productivity was approximately one-half the national average. A rocky coast and stormy weather made fishing difficult. When offshore fishing rights were given to a neighbouring area, 70 fishing boats in Mio lost employment. In 1887, a Mio carpenter visited Steveston and was soon followed by most of the young men from his village. Mio became known as "America-mura" and prospered on the basis of remittances sent back from Canada. Many of the young fishers, if they had the means, returned to Mio during the winter season.

The events that created a large surplus population with little means of subsistence to keep it alive at home were similar in the two countries. As Japan became involved in the international economy, the state embarked on a program of rapid industrialisation. But financing was done on the backs of the peasantry. Rice remained the standard of

value and landlords began to drain the peasants of their produce. Many were taxed to the point of exhaustion. The rate of infanticide and abortion, which increased in these years, testifies to the inability of many families to feed all their members. The end result was a series of agrarian revolts; Adachi counts at least 190 in the years between 1867 and 1877. The new industrial developments were superimposed on a basically feudal economy. As late as 1885, at least 70 percent of the households were agricultural. Unable to pay taxes, many peasants were forced to sell their land, becoming tenants or leaving the land to search for work in urban areas. But the population had increased considerably, from 35 million in 1872 to 44 million in 1900, and the towns could not absorb the surplus.

Japanese Contracted Labour

As in China, therefore, overseas economies absorbed a large part of this surplus. The merchant class, despised in feudal Japan, began to acquire power when industrial development was promoted by the state. And merchant companies sprang up to handle labour contracts for overseas work. Although the government tried to regulate emigration, these firms acquired effective control. An emigration company had to apply to the Japanese Foreign Office for permission to send out a specified number of labourers. Each labourer had to supply a passport, a certified copy of his family register and undergo scrutiny by the local police. Labourers were expected to return after a specified period of time. Companies specialising in labour contracting were formed originally to meet the demand for cheap labour on the Hawaiian sugar plantations. To prevent

abuses, the Japanese government, in 1884, stipulated that these "agents" be incorporated under the authority of the Minister of Home Affairs. The companies continued to grow, and abuses apparently continued. By 1900, there were 12 companies and 17 by 1907. In 1908, all but three were suppressed.

Similar to Chinese contracting outfits, the Japanese firms were in the business to make a profit. They frequently induced peasants and labourers to sell their land and belongings, and, if the emigrant lacked sufficient money for the fare, the firm advanced him a loan. A commission of up to 25 yen per head was collected for services such as assistance abroad and a guaranteed return trip if the labourer became sick or impoverished.

It was claimed during the Royal Commission proceedings of 1900 that emigration companies, agents of steamship companies, brokers and boarding house keepers were all intimately connected in an unbroken chain to exploit the situation. If to the list were added the contractors and the gang "bosses," operating in Canada to lead the men to work, then the "organized scheme" was further extended. (Adachi, 1976: 25-26)

Adachi notes that, by 1900, Japanese labour was displacing Chinese, for example, in railroad construction. The men were young, single and knew no English (although their level of education was generally higher than that of the Chinese). The Japanese contractor in Canada acted as an intermediary between the employee and employer. Although the immigrants originally worked individually, when their numbers began to rise, a Japanese contractor would organise groups of men and negotiate contracts on their behalf, "assuming upon himself the expense of maintaining them, all the while retaining for himself a profit on the transaction" (ibid.: 31). A commission of ten cents a day was charged

for each day worked. The cheap boarding and lodging houses in Vancouver's Japan town were a major recruiting ground for contractors. "Indeed in the early years, as the immigrants stepped from boat to lodging house to gang, there did not seem to have been a real break from their homeland" (ibid.: 32).

A comparison can be made here between the situation of the contractor physically maintaining Chinese and Japanese labourers and that of European men maintaining their wives and children in the nuclear household. The labour of Chinese, Japanese, white women and children becomes available as cheap labour, mediated through the contractor on the one hand, and the husband/father on the other. Obviously, it is much cheaper to maintain single Chinese and Japanese men than it is to reproduce the labour not only of the current generation of workers but also that of the next generation. In the case of contract labour, the next generation was being reproduced in China and Japan. Another point of difference is that white women were providing the work necessary to maintain the "free" male labourer, while Chinese and Japanese labourers maintained their contractors not with direct work (use value) but indirectly through the profits contractors made (often absolute surplus value, since contractors could often only make a profit by cutting back on food and working their labour force all that much harder). The two sets of situations contain many obvious differences, but when one considers them in the light of the capitalist's need for cheap labour, striking similarities begin to emerge. And it is important to note here that the labour contract prevailed while the men had no families with them. When Chinese and Japanese men began to bring wives over from

their homeland, a different wage relationship with employers was created. Their wives now supported them, not the contractor. And the men could now exercise a measure of control, unlike the previous situation in which they were helpless. And so their own wives and children became available as a cheap labour force, as demonstrated by the entry of Japanese and Chinese women into the salmon canneries in the present century. The labour of these women undercut that of white women because their households, like those of native women, preserved pre-capitalist relations. They resided in their own communities in extended families. Older people were available to look after children, and a number of people working for low wages could collectively contribute a decent income to the household, unlike women in nuclear households where there were usually only two wage earners. Salmon canneries today continue to employ women from newly immigrant groups (many organised in extended households), and women comprise over fifty percent of the seasonal plant labour force, depending on the year.⁹

At the turn of the century, the Japanese contractor often had a wife helping him. She usually did the cooking and laundry for the gangs (Knight and Koizumi, 1976: 30). In an oral history account, one man recalls that, when he married a picture bride in 1906, the canner promoted him to become the boss of a boarding house (probably a bunkhouse), in charge of 40 to 50 men. "The 'boss' earned a commission according to the catch of his 'boys' and negotiated with the company on their behalf, while his wife cooked and served as a mother-substitute for the 'boys'" (Marlatt and Koizumi, 1975: 11). The boss also

controlled between 20 and 30 boats and received the advances made by the cannery for labour.

Towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Japanese women began to emigrate. Many were "picture brides," never having seen their husbands before coming to Canada. A man would write to his family in Japan and request that a marriage be arranged. The family would search for a suitable mate and send a picture. Upon approval, the marriage was registered in Japan, and the marriage ceremony repeated in Canada. These were years of tightened immigration control on Chinese and Japanese populations, and this was often the only way a woman could enter the country, if she had no relatives in Canada. Many of these women helped their husbands on fish boats, as did native women (most boats at this time were gillnetters, requiring two people to handle them). Cannery bunkhouses contained only men, even if a woman looked after their needs (Skogan, 1983: 83). Japanese fishers with wives would have to seek separate accommodation. In the south, Steveston began to develop as a fishing village. Gasoline engines introduced at this time made travel over long distances faster and easier, and thus fishers would commute from their homes in urban centres.

The commissioners investigating Chinese and Japanese immigration, in May of 1900, visited Steveston. They found "a busy hive of men" almost all of whom (except for supervisors) were Chinese and Japanese. The Chinese were busy making cans, while the Japanese were building and repairing boats for the coming season (Royal Commission, 1902: 357). Japanese immigration escalated from 691 in 1896-1897 to 9033 in 1899-

1900, although the latter figure was unusual. Most of the emigrants had been bound for Honolulu but the port was closed due to an outbreak of bubonic plague. The United States was not accepting Japanese immigrants, and, rather than return home, the vessels continued on to British Columbia. The total number of Japanese immigrants from 1896 to 1901 was 13,913 (ibid.: 327). Many of them entered the fishing industry. They began to hold a large proportion of fishing licences. In 1896 they held only 452 of a total of 3533, but by 1901 they held 1958 out of a total of 4722 licences (and each licenced fisher usually employed an unlicenced boat puller) (ibid.). Japanese fishers, unlike white and native fishers, fished under contract to the canners. The men lived on company premises and were dependent on boats, advances and provisions on the canners and contractors. They were a subordinated labour force, unlike the independent white and native fishers.

White fishers had grown in number over the years, and had become a militant labour force, pressing canners for higher fish prices (they were paid by the piece at this time). In 1900 and 1901, two major strikes occurred (Ralston, 1965). The canners used the Japanese fishers as strike breakers. In fact, canners probably employed the Japanese from the start as a means of controlling fishing on the Fraser, once limits on licenses were lifted, allowing independent fishers to enter the industry. The racial hatred marring the history of the provincial fisheries dates from this period, culminating in the forceful evacuation of Japanese people from the coast after the bombing of Pearl Harbour.

Testifying at the Royal Commission hearings in 1900, the canners argued Japanese fishers were indispensable, for the same reason Chinese

cannery workers had proven to be indispensable. Both groups provided cheap labour power. It could be argued that the Japanese were hired on the fishing side of the business for the same reason Chinese had been hired earlier for cannery work. White fishers on the Fraser were becoming a militant and organised group, often able to ally themselves with native fishers against the canners. At this point in time, the Japanese were a subordinated group and had little option but to act as strike breakers. They had no other means of subsistence except through work found by contractors. When they began to fish as independents, there is evidence that they too became militant. European, native and Japanese fishers can all point to instances when one group was striking while another group broke their strike, as well as instances when all three groups acted cooperatively. When the Japanese returned after the Second World War, racism in the industry became less marked. But when the Japanese returned, they no longer laboured for contractors. The industry had changed. The modern period will be examined in Chapter 7 after an analysis of the role of the state in the industry.

¹Some of the first salmon canneries were extensions of salteries (Gregory and Barnes, 1939: 30). "The nineteenth century added canning to the older methods - drying, salting, smoking, and pickling - of extending the range over which fish could be transported" (Ralston, 1981: 297).

² During the same period [early nineteenth century], the industrial revolution of Europe had completely transformed many European agricultural societies to industrial nations. Britain, France and other countries were seeking international hinterlands for exporting their finished products, and for extracting raw materials and cheap labour to be used for industrial production. China became attractive to these industrial nations as a weak country with a large potential market [sic] for trade (Bolaria and Li, 1985: 83).

³It must be emphasised that Chinese labour is only being examined here from the perspective of its employment in salmon canneries. Boswell (1986), among others, notes how Chinese also operated as independent placer miners, as small manufacturers and merchants and in other types of wage situation. These other pursuits are not examined here except as they relate to salmon canning.

⁴Boswell (1986) argues in a similar vein.

⁵"Chinese women traditionally did not leave their home village and only about 3 per cent of the Chinese immigrants were women. The 'six companies,' which kept records on their clan members, estimated that 80-90 per cent of the approximately 6,000 Chinese women in California in 1876 were prostitutes, many of whom were forcibly imported" (Boswell, 1986: 359).

⁶ George W. Hume was the first salmon canner to employ Chinese. This was at Eagle Cliff in 1872. At this period the white laborers in the canneries were recruited from the riffraff and criminal element of Portland. He had a Chinese working for him and through this man secured a Chinese gang from Portland. This labor proved so satisfactory that the custom soon spread to the other canneries. It was not found that the Chinese could do the work any better or quicker than the white laborer, but they proved more reliable in their work and gave less trouble (Cobb, 1930: 430).

It should be pointed out that British Columbia had a larger native population than did the Pacific U.S. states. However, there were larger urban settlements on the U.S. side of the border from which labour forces could be drawn. All the evidence points to a movement of Chinese

labourers from the U.S. to Canada. Before restrictive legislation, Chinese labourers migrated throughout the Pacific northwest in search of jobs which were generally seasonal.

- 7 Cannery labor is supplied largely through the contract system. In the large cities along the coast are agencies, mainly owned by Chinese, which make a specialty of furnishing labor for canning. In the agreement between the canning company and the contractor the company guarantees to pack a certain number of cases during the coming season, and the latter agrees to do all the work from the time the fish are delivered on the wharf until they are ready to ship at the end of the season for a certain fixed sum per case...The company transports the Chinese to the field of work and carries them to the home port at the end of the season. It provides them with a bunk house and furnishes fuel, water, and salt. The contractor sends along with each crew a "boss," who has charge of the crew and furnishes their food, the company transporting this free (Cobb, 1930: 500).

⁸The historical account that follows is taken from Adachi (1976), The Enemy That Never Was.

⁹During the off-season, the percentage of women employed had fallen as low as 5.3 per cent (in December 1981) indicating that the permanently-employed labour force is male (UFAWU, 1984: Table A, p. 28a).

CHAPTER 6

State Involvement in the Relations between Capital and Labour

The second chapter closed with a brief theoretical discussion of the state. An attempt was made to incorporate recent work in this area and to demonstrate both the agency of the state (the Miliband perspective) as well as its structural role, made necessary because of the fundamental contradictions within capitalist and between capitalist and pre-capitalist relations of production (the concept of "pertinent effects" developed by Poulantzas). The state, in its various manifestations (colonial, federal, provincial) has played an important role in the B.C. fisheries in both respects. It has acted as an independent player, or agent, and it has simultaneously been forced to take such a role because of the contradictions and struggles over the fisheries, involving fishers and canners, native peoples and commercial fishers, competing uses by capitalists over resources encroaching on the fisheries, and, increasingly since the end of the second world war, between canners and unionised shoreworkers. And, to complicate matters further, the federal and provincial states have played significantly different roles, representing different class interests and alliances. For example, while provincial legislators developed immigration policies

restricting the entry of non-white groups and denying political participation to those groups already resident in the province, the federal state acquired from Great Britain the management of "Indian affairs" and the saltwater fisheries (the major provincial fisheries). In addition, different class fractions exercised power through the two states, leading to considerable conflict at the level of the political.

Shoreworkers were immediately affected by two sets of state policies. The political climate in British Columbia promoting racism included a refusal to recognise aboriginal rights. Previous chapters have traced the evolution of various sets of pre-capitalist relations, "pertinent effects," releasing various groups (native peoples, Chinese and Japanese peasants) to work for wages significantly below those of the European male working class. Although canners made use of these relations to extract a surplus and pay wages below the costs of production and reproduction of labour power within a capitalist mode of production, the preservation of those pre-capitalist relations was external to the economics of capitalism. It required political interference. However, even at the level of the political, there was contradiction. While the provincial state continuously agitated against politically recognising any of these groups (making them politically invisible and thus denying them the right to struggle over economic issues through the state), the federal state had to recognise native rights. To the extent that the native economies were preserved and simultaneously made dependent on money and commodity markets, the situation proved useful to canners. In addition, the Indian Act defined the manner in which native peoples could participate in political

structures. Their participation was structured differently from that of the ordinary citizen, whose rights were denied them. And, to complicate matters further, the federal state, through its ties to Great Britain was forced to maintain friendly ties with China and Japan. In turn, these relations were threatened by the racist legislation enacted in British Columbia. Before discussing the political role of racism in the fisheries, the links between canners and the state will be briefly explored.

Capital Formation and State Involvement

In Chapter 3, a brief history of capital formation was given. Missing from that history is the role played by the state. The federal state became an important player in the industry after Confederation, when it assumed state responsibility for the management of the fisheries. But capital formation in the nascent salmon canning industry reflected the older colonial ties, linking what became British Columbia in a triangular relationship with San Francisco merchants and British markets through merchant capital centred in Victoria (Ralston, 1981). The federal Canadian state reflected a new pattern of capital formation, linked to the western movement of banking capital and the building of a federally subsidised transcontinental railroad.

Initially, salmon canners developed ties with local merchants and local politicians. Salmon canners early organised associations, like the Salmon Canners' Association, to represent their interests politically.¹ The various fisheries reports also give evidence that salmon canners participated directly, sitting on the boards of various

trade councils, such as the one in New Westminster, the early urban centre of the Fraser River fishery. These councils, in turn, carried weight with the provincial state. The connections between capitalist and legislator were often direct. Thus, McDonald (1981: 374-375) notes that, until 1898, political ideals were based on "the exploitation of regional resources through the provision of public concessions to private interests. Victoria businessmen constituted both the governments that granted and the interests that received these concessions. While Victoria merchants controlled hinterland trade and development, Victoria government promoted hinterland development."

As noted in the earlier chapter, salmon canners assumed more direct control over capital financing with the westward movement of the banks, displacing the old mercantile interests centred in Victoria. However, the new changes also led to an eclipse of the importance of the salmon canning industry in the provincial economy. "While salmon canning represented the persistence into the twentieth century of B.C.'s traditional maritime connections, the industry's role as a leading agent of provincial economic growth belonged to the nineteenth" (ibid.: 380). McDonald lists markets as one of the main reasons the industry was unable to maintain its dominance. Railroads displaced ocean transport, and salmon canners were unable to make the necessary adjustments. While transcontinental railroads opened a new market in the southern states for American canners, B.C. canners were unable to develop a similar domestic market. One reason was the small size of the Canadian population. But an equally important factor was the lack of state aid

in subsidising rail costs to help lower costs and thus help to develop such a market.

The origins of the Canadian federal state were closely connected to the building of a transcontinental railroad and to the financial interests connected with the project. And, just as in British Columbia, financial and state interests were often embodied in the same people: "the relationship between the first post-confederation cabinets and the financial bourgeoisie and the railway entrepreneurs [sic] was not only close - they were often the same people" (Panitch, 1977: 11). The federal state became involved in capital accumulation in a direct manner, in financing the railway. And, because financing involved British interests, dependence on Great Britain continued. In addition, to begin to meet the debts incurred in its construction, the federal state encouraged immigration to settle the prairie regions (Fowke, 1957). In turn, this led to skewed or uneven development. Central Canadian industries were encouraged in developing a western market for their goods, while western producers were encouraged to ship unprocessed or semi-processed natural resources, like wheat and lumber, to the east by rail.

And, as industrial capital developed in the United States, the Canadian economy became increasingly dependent on the American. After the first world war, Canadian resources were increasingly in demand to fuel American industry. Since natural resources were generally managed by provincial states, regional interests began to ally with the American rather than the federal Canadian state (Stevenson, 1977: 78). However, American investment in natural resource extraction led to a new form of

dependency, with unprocessed or semi-processed resources manufactured into final commodities across the border. Thus, both the federal and the provincial states have been involved, often in different ways, in developing Canadian economic dependence.

It has been the very lack of relative autonomy of the state, the sheer depth of its commitment to private capital as the motor force of the society, which, when combined with a weak indigenous industrial bourgeoisie and a strong financial bourgeoisie cast in the mould of an intermediary between staple production in Canada and industrial empires abroad, explains the lengths to which the state has gone in promoting private capital accumulation not only for the domestic bourgeoisie but for foreign capitalists as well (Panitch, 1977: 16-17).

One of the casualties of these new developments was the B.C. salmon canning industry. Upon completion of the railroad, tariffs were put in place to favour the movement of specific types of goods in specific directions. The end result was that American traffic was favoured over Canadian; eastern traffic over western; the movement of raw materials east and finished goods west; and long-distance over local traffic (Naylor, 1975: Vol. II, 26). In British Columbia, such trade patterns helped stimulate the movement of timber and minerals in an unprocessed or semi-processed condition out of the province. No attempts were made to help promote domestic fish consumption until 1908, when the federal state undertook to pay one-third of the expenses on less-than-carload lots of fresh/frozen fish from the Pacific to the eastern boundary of Manitoba (the Atlantic provinces received the same subsidy for shipments to eastern and central Canadian markets).

Fish is a home product. It costs nothing to cultivate, and the capital invested in the fisheries in comparison with the yield, is smaller than in any other food producing industry. Fish should, consequently, be a cheap food in all parts of the country, but to

make it so, adequate transportation facilities at moderate prices, must be available (DMF, 1917: xv).

Because fisheries officials tended to view the provincial salmon canning industry as over-developed in comparison to other fisheries, no attempts were made by the state to develop domestic markets for canned salmon. Salmon canners continued to rely on foreign markets in which other countries dominated. And the federal state virtually handed the halibut fishery to American interests. The New England Fishing Company, which established a base in Vancouver in 1894, was given special privileges. From 1897, U.S. fishing vessels coming to B.C. ports were allowed to ship their fish in bond to the United States (DMF, 1919: LIV, 10(39), 8). Beginning in 1915, after the railway to Prince Rupert was finished, this privilege was extended. Fish caught in American bottoms could be shipped to the United States over Canadian rails. The intent of state officials was to develop Prince Rupert as a railway terminus, port, and centre of the halibut fisheries, by encouraging buyers to locate their businesses there. The result was American domination of the Canadian halibut fishery.

Problems were also encountered with Americans over the lack of a duty on fresh fish (other than sockeye salmon) shipped to the United States. American canners, unlike their B.C. counterparts, had a domestic market for the cheaper grades of canned salmon, a market protected from Canadian competition. Thus, American canners could afford to pay Canadian fishers higher prices. While fishers benefited, Canadian canners lacked both the market and the opportunity to process fish caught by Canadian fishers. Dependency of the Canadian on the

American economy is illustrated in the fact that the federal state was unable to negotiate the removal of the American duty on Canadian canned salmon, preventing Canadian canners from developing an American market for their products (DMF, 1918: 231).

These particular examples illustrate the wider contradictions inherent in the Canadian federal and state structures as applied to the B.C. fisheries. In fact, the fisheries have more than once been a major battle ground between the Canadian and U.S. states. The two countries almost went to war with each other, in the nineteenth century over control of the Atlantic fisheries. On the Pacific, the two sides have struggled over the Puget Sound and Fraser River salmon fisheries. While the capture of salmon with the use of traps was generally forbidden in provincial waters (J. H. Todd received special political dispensation, allowing him to use traps off Vancouver Island), it was allowed on the American side of the border. There are many complaints in the fishery reports that Canadian federal laws and enforcement of regulations were far more stringent than American, meaning that Canadians were in effect preserving the resource for American industry. A treaty regulating salmon catches on Puget Sound and Fraser River was continuously blocked by the American state, and took many decades before it became law. The whole area of competing state as well as capitalist class interests in the fisheries is enormously complicated. The major reason for introducing it here at all is to point to that complexity and to sketch a few of the interests involved on the side of capital.

State Ideology and Racism²

The production relations between classes determine the way in which people interpret their social world, that is, their ideological perspective. The mode of production by which subsistence is created differs from one epoch to another, and it is the specific mode at any time which determines the organization of the society and moulds the perception of life itself (Marchak, 1981: 97-98).

In the previous section, state involvement in capital accumulation was very briefly sketched. Another important function of the state is the creation and dissemination of an ideology serving to unite classes opposed to one another in production relations (Poulantzas refers to this as the level of the economic). From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, an ideology of white supremacy united British Columbians against perceived economic, cultural and military threats from non-European groups.

From the mid-nineteenth century, British Columbia was composed of three distinct groups: Europeans, Chinese and native peoples. By the end of the century, the population of people native to the province had been devastated to the point where it was no longer perceived to be a threat.

That a deep and permanent racial cleavage divided British Columbia its white residents were well aware. In assessing the origins of this racial division, however, they could largely ignore the native Indian population for it had long since been pushed aside and seemed to languish in decay. The Asian community, on the other hand, was a dynamic, growing segment in west coast society. Its continued expansion promised only to broaden the racial fissure which already fragmented this society.

Cultural pluralism, then, was unacceptable to the white community. Within it the plural condition generated profound, irrational racial fears. Pluralism stirred a deep longing for the social cohesion which could only be achieved, it seemed, by attaining racial homogeneity (Ward, 1978: 92-93).

Ward offers a psychological explanation for the racial ideology developed in British Columbia. While much of his findings will be used in this section, it is argued that those findings can be interpreted within a socioeconomic framework, based on structural rather than purely psychological criteria.³ Whites, Chinese and native peoples came from profoundly different economic, cultural and social sets of relations. And they did not come to participate in the nascent provincial capitalist economy on equal terms, as demonstrated in the last three chapters. Nor were they segregated economically, but competed unequally over jobs and wages. Thus, the European working class was threatened economically by the employment of other groups at wages insufficient for this group to produce and reproduce its labour power. Europeans participated fully within a capitalist mode of production, while other groups were only partially integrated. And those European men engaged in dependent commodity production or organised in strong craft unions, held a bargaining edge with employers denied to other groups. However, ideologically they allied themselves with European state and capital interests rather than with their proletarian class interests until the period of the second world war, when those alignments began to change.

The European male working class was well aware of the economic threat posed by cheap labour forces, even if those labourers were segregated in terms of actual jobs, sometimes industries. For wages are determined in the market place and not on the basis of specific tasks. If most of the wage labour force could labour at costs of production and reproduction of labour power below that necessary for the reproduction of European labour power, then European labourers were threatened, even

if, in the short run, they could extract higher wages on the basis of skills or employment as dependent commodity producers. However, the recognition that the threat was based in the logic of capitalism rather than the colour of a person's skin, or in their gender, required the development of class consciousness. The classes in power struggled to prevent class consciousness from emerging, and instead pointed to physical and cultural differences. In the short term, they were successful.

While the numbers of native people declined, Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian labourers migrated from countries containing many millions. The threat of numerical dominance by non-white majorities was used to increase the paranoia of Europeans. From 1858 until the exclusion act of 1923, Chinese immigration was marked by significant peaks. Mid-nineteenth century British Columbia was a gold-mining frontier, punctuated by gold rushes whereby the population swelled, only to ebb once the gold fever was spent. In this period, the Chinese formed a significant proportion of the population. By the early 1880s, they formed over 20 percent. Large numbers were further brought in for railroad construction. By 1921, however, European immigration far outnumbered Chinese, and the latter formed less than six percent of the provincial population (Ward, 1978: 15).

Attitudes against the Chinese began to harden in the 1860s, when an economic depression left many miners unemployed. The first attempts at legal discrimination, however, were not made until after confederation. Provincial politicians were successful in passing a bill to exclude the Chinese from the provincial franchise. In 1878, the Chinese Tax Act was

passed. All Chinese residents over 12 years of age had to pay a quarterly tax of ten dollars. Salmon canners protested against the tax. And Chinese labourers in Victoria went on a strike lasting several days, refusing to work for white employers. The issue was settled when the B.C. Supreme Court declared the act ultra vires provincial jurisdiction.

Employers using large Chinese labour forces found themselves in conflict with provincial politicians agitating for restrictions. As noted in an earlier chapter, salmon canners testified at the royal commissions held in 1885 and 1902 that the industry would not have succeeded without Chinese labour. Although they were paid wages one-third to one-half below those paid to their white counterparts, they had developed important skills in certain industries. "The Chinese cannery worker at the turn of the century was typical...He possessed significant industrial skills, a fact acknowledged by his employer, and he stood on a middle rung in the province's labour hierarchy" (ibid.: 16). Immigration restrictions reduced the number of Chinese labourers available. Skilled labourers who remained in the province could command higher wages. Salmon canners responded by displacing skilled Chinese butchers with machines. It is probably significant that the "Iron Chink" was adopted after 1905, after head taxes were raised, and Chinese immigration further restricted.

Although the provincial state continued to enact restrictive legislation after 1878, it was blocked by the federal state. Large numbers of cheap labourers were required to complete the railroad. In 1882, Onderdonk informed Prime Minister Macdonald Chinese labour was essential to complete the railroad within a reasonable time frame. Not

only were efforts by the provincial state to restrict immigration defeated, larger numbers of Chinese labourers were allowed entry. Even after completion of the rail line, CPR interests continued to run counter to policies favouring restriction. Its steamship line developed a lucrative transpacific passenger trade, and immigration quotas threatened to reduce profits (Ward, 1978: 35, 59).

Although the federal state was often forced to nullify provincial legislation, it also developed an ideology of exclusion. While federal legislation tended to be couched in non-racist language, the intent was similar. Macdonald had to cede to railway interests and thus could not, for the moment, limit immigration. He did, however, upon pressure from eastern labour unions, introduce an amendment to the Franchise Act, preventing any "person of Mongolian or Chinese race" from voting in federal elections (ibid.: 40). The federal state was capable of being just as racist as the provincial, "for the purposes of the act, the term 'person' was not intended to include Chinese or Mongolians" (ibid.: 179). From 1885 until 1947, the year Chinese and East Indians were granted the federal and provincial franchises, they, as well as native peoples, were not considered persons by the state. At the political level, they simply did not exist (except, in the case of the latter, as wards of the federal state).

In the 1890s, Japanese immigrants began to arrive in significant numbers. Provincial politicians extended legislation to incorporate new groups. Thus, the Japanese were disenfranchised in 1895, and, in 1907, East Indians were included. "In particular, all naturalized and

Canadian-born Asiatics were stripped of the franchise, and rendered politically impotent" (ibid.: 55).

In a series of "Gentlemen's Agreements," Japan had agreed to voluntarily restrict emigration to certain countries. In 1902, Japan signed a diplomatic alliance with Great Britain, and emigration restrictions were extended to Canada. For this reason, the Japanese were originally considered less of a threat than the Chinese. However, restrictions were lifted in 1907, and, in that year, a significant number of Japanese immigrants entered via Hawaii. Since 1903, Chinese immigration had been rising. Several emigration agencies in Vancouver negotiated contracts with large Canadian corporations to provide them with Japanese labour. In 1905, Japan defeated Russia, and from that date onward, began to be perceived as a military threat. All of these events resulted in the 1907 riot of whites against the Chinese and Japanese communities in Vancouver. Significantly, the target was property (ibid.: 59-70). "The riot placed the Laurier government in a rather awkward position. It was forced to placate both Japan and British Columbia simultaneously" (ibid.: 73). Negotiations concluded with Japan again agreeing to voluntarily restrict emigration, to 400 per year.

Racial issues were not paramount only in British Columbia at this time. They formed an important issue in the election campaigns waged by both the federal liberal and conservative parties. Future Prime Minister Robert Borden pledged the Conservative party

will ever maintain one supreme consideration to which all material considerations must give way; and it is this: British Columbia must remain a British and Canadian province, inhabited and

dominated by men in whose veins runs the blood of those great pioneering races which built up and developed not only Western, but Eastern Canada. (ibid.: 75).

The following year, in 1908, the federal government approved an order in council effectively closing the doors to further Japanese and East Indian immigrants. All immigrants were prohibited from entering Canada unless they came from their own country of birth or citizenship by "a continuous journey and on through tickets" purchased in their home country. There was no direct steamship route from either Japan or India.

The order provided effective restriction while avoiding the distasteful and increasingly unacceptable practice of indicating undesirable immigrants by race or nationality. Henceforth this order and the Lemieux agreement, together with the Chinese Immigration Act, formed the new foundations of the Liberal government's Oriental immigration restriction policy (ibid.: 76).

The East Indian community successfully challenged the legality of federal immigration restrictions, resulting, in 1914, in the Komagatu Maru incident. The ship's passengers were prevented from disembarking in Vancouver. A local newspaper proclaimed: "There are 300,000,000 natives of India behind them, who have the same rights as these" (ibid.: 90). Ward demonstrates most of these immigrants were, like Chinese and Japanese immigrants, of peasant background. They also left their families behind, hoping to earn enough in Canada to ameliorate conditions of families left behind in the home country. Very few, if any, East Indian men were employed in the fisheries. However, when they began to bring their families into Canada, East Indian women found employment in the fish plants. In the 1980s, they occupy the lowest ranks in terms of wages and seniority.

Unlike Chinese labourers, who did not bring their families to Canada for several decades, Japanese men did so more quickly. From the early 1890s to the 1920s, Japanese men came to represent a significant proportion of the province's fishers. Initially, immigration was confined, as for the Chinese, to unattached young men. But the situation began to change between 1910 and 1930. Thus, while in 1911, the ratio of Japanese men to women was about five to one, by 1921 it was two to one, decreasing further after that year. In comparison, the proportion of Chinese men to women in 1911 was 28 to one, and by 1921 had only decreased to 15 to one (*ibid.*: 109, 187). Japanese women immigrated at a time when the fresh/frozen fish markets and refrigeration techniques were being developed. Many of them entered the fisheries, and gained a reputation in the industry as highly skilled filleters, especially in the Fraser River area.

As the proportion of Japanese to white and native fishers rose, the federal state was pressured to limit their numbers. It eventually adopted a policy of eliminating them altogether from the provincial fisheries. Japanese immigrants did not enter the industry only as fishers; they also developed industries of their own. In particular, they developed a lucrative business dry salting fish for export to Asia. Federal fisheries officials developed policies aimed at putting control of this industry in white or native hands. "In view of the policy of the department looking to the elimination of the Orientals the industry should be totally in the hands of the white population and Canadian Indians by 1927" (*DMF*, 1924-25: 54). The fisheries department did not

have to develop a similar policy to eliminate the Chinese because provincial legislation had taken care of the matter.

In the salmon canning industry, the state was notable through its absence. While the federal state acquired management of the fisheries, the provincial state was responsible for the canneries themselves (although who could receive fees from licensing them was a bone of contention for several years). In the 1920s, the provincial government began to use labour legislation as a means of restricting employment of Asian labourers. "The minimum wage law enacted in 1926 was intended to enforce a basic wage in selected industries; if this were done it would eliminate that competitive edge which Orientals enjoyed" (Ward, 1978: 137). However, this was not necessary in the salmon canning industry. White male labourers never expressed much interest in doing the work assigned to Chinese and native female labourers. They found employment in other areas, as machinemen and reduction plant workers (a highly mechanised part of the industry), and were employed directly on company payrolls. The seasonal labour forces, on the other hand, were employed on contracts and thus did not compete with permanently employed staff. And, when other groups, especially non-English speaking women who had moved to the cities, became available for the seasonal jobs, the Chinese could be eliminated through provincial legislation.

Until the 1930s, the Canadian labour movement tended to be racist in its outlook and organisation. The situation began to change during the depression years, but, in the fishing industry, there was a last surge during the second world war, when Japanese Canadians were forcibly evicted from coastal British Columbia. Many fishers actively promoted

their removal, and benefited materially by acquiring Japanese fishing vessels at nominal prices.

Working-class pressure during the depression and war years forced changes in labour legislation. Trade unions and collective bargaining were legally recognised. In the fishing industry, fishers and Communist Party trade unionists organised an industrial trade union covering the entire provincial fishing industry. Minimum wage legislation was enacted and extended to cover most industries, making systems like the Chinese contract inoperative. As part of the new legislation, employers had to list their employees by name on company payrolls, thus eliminating the advantages of contracting labour out to middlemen. Along with labour legislation improving wages and conditions of work, groups began to press for an end to discriminatory legislation. However, immigration laws continued to be phrased in ways that selected groups and individuals allowed entry into Canada. Nevertheless, in 1947, the federal state repealed the Chinese Immigration Act, although numbers continued to be limited. In the same year, Chinese and East Indian Canadians were granted the federal and provincial franchise, extended, in 1949, to include Japanese Canadians.

Within capitalism, the franchise is crucial to participation not only in political, but also in economic life. Macpherson notes that, within capitalism, democracy is redefined: "the old idea of democracy, as rule by and for the poor, had been converted to the idea of democracy as the right to get into the competition" (Macpherson, 1979: 47). The state influences relations of power. And, in a society where access to the means of labour is blocked, power becomes defined in these terms.

So in any society where the legal institutions give all the property in land, or any other means of labour, to one section of the people, all the others must pay for access to the means of labour...Whatever form the payment takes, it is a transfer of a man's powers (or part of the produce of these powers) to another man, and it is compulsive (ibid.: 41).

Thus, to enter into these power relations, even in a relation of dependency, as a seller of labour power, requires recognition by the state that one is an individual capable of entering into a contractual relation. When the state refuses to recognise whole groups on the basis of their race, then these groups are powerless politically as well as economically. While European male workers bargained with employers through the state, these other groups remained peripheral to capitalist relations of production.⁴ When they eventually achieved political personhood, by acquiring the right to vote, they could then join organised workers to press for better wages and working conditions. But this eroded the capability of employers to hire wage labour at costs below the costs necessary to produce and reproduce labour power within a wholly capitalist economy (approaching the pure capitalist mode of production envisaged by Marx). This did not mean, however, that capitalists were now willing to pay those costs in full. The state took on another function, developing social services and programs to maintain labourers as pre-capitalist relations of production were increasingly eroded. Thus, the welfare state occupies a contradictory location in partially producing and reproducing labour power. This not only allows capitalist employers to pay wages below those costs, it also allows pre-capitalist relations, like those incorporated in the nuclear family and

the native economy, to continue, even when they can no longer supplement wages by providing unpaid work to maintain and reproduce labour power.

Labour and the Welfare State

There is a logic to capitalism, which Poulantzas demonstrates by identifying the structural components. However, in spite of its logic, the capitalist economy is an unplanned one. "The secret of capitalism is that nobody plans it" (Gough, 1979: 29, emphasis in original). The relations that develop between classes are formed on the basis of the intervention of non-labourers in the control of labourers over their means of subsistence. Although there is an order and logic to these relations, there is no conscious plan. Neither can the state plan the economy, in spite of the claims of politicians to be able to do otherwise. The state is itself a set of relations that develop out of the economic contradictions between labourers and non-labourers. Those who exercise power in the name of the state can only hope to channel relations in a certain direction, one that will ensure the long-term interests of the capitalist class as a whole. Their task is made all the more difficult because, although relations between capital and labour develop logically, capitalism itself is illogical. The capitalist mode of production is rooted in the continual expansion of the forces and means of production, in the continual creation of surplus convertible into profit.

First, exploitation takes place automatically within the economic system: that is, the extraction of surplus labour does not require the political coercion, open or latent, of feudalism or conscious control by means of the market. Second, and due to this, the capitalist economy has a momentum or dynamic of its own which

is again basically outside the control of any agent or class. Together these indicate that under capitalism the 'economy' becomes separated from politics, the 'private' sphere from the 'public.' The notion of a distinct political sphere is, therefore, peculiar to capitalism (ibid.: 39-40).

The "paradox is that the modern state expressing a 'common will'...only appears with the anarchic unplanned system of capitalism" (ibid.: 175). All of these factors combine to make possible a number of political decisions, all constrained by structural circumstances existing at any one time. Thus, class struggle at the political level becomes possible; in fact, desirable since the state can then diffuse class contradictions. The evolution of the welfare state within advanced capitalism can be understood as simultaneously a product of working-class struggle as well as a means of containing that struggle, of acknowledging it and allowing it expression within the system.

But the welfare state also develops because two contradictions become acute: structured unemployment and the production and reproduction of labour power within the family. Gough defines the welfare state as "the use of state power to modify the reproduction of labour power and to maintain the non-working population in capitalist society" (ibid.: 44-45). The divorce of labourers from control over their means of subsistence results in their being forced to offer their labour power for a wage in order to subsist. But the more the forces of production are developed, the more craft skills become embodied in machinery and technology, displacing large sectors of the working class (Braverman, 1974). Structural unemployment is chronic in advanced capitalist economies.

In addition, the capitalist mode of production transforms pre-capitalist relations, and disrupts the self-sufficiency of communities founded on pre-capitalist relations of production and subsistence. But these communities also perform necessary services in producing and reproducing labour power. Since these services are not taken on by the capitalist class, the state steps in:

[I]n terms of the use value consumed in the course of reproducing labour power, an increasing portion of them are [sic] now provided directly by the state and are not purchased at all by the family. Yet these services contribute to the daily and generational reproduction of the working class in just the same way as commodities. If they are excluded from the value of labour power, it is clear that the latter is progressively diverging from its original definition - the total labour necessary to reproduce the worker and his/her family (Gough, 1979: 117).

The development of capitalism results in increasing strains in those areas of life not directly within the market economy. The state helps alleviate some of those strains, but at the same time it helps to commodify services previously undertaken in the non-wage (pre-capitalist) sectors. "For our purposes we may assume that the proportion of total use values provided by the welfare state is increasing by comparison with the capitalist and domestic sectors" (ibid.: 182).

The development of the welfare state in the post-war period had important effects on the composition of labour forces in shore plants. Recognition of trade unions and collective bargaining displaced the services previously provided by contractors. At the same time, by duplicating services previously provided within the family, the state partially released the labour power of women. Coupled with developing technology within the home, women could labour for wages. Indeed many

had to because a single income was no longer sufficient to maintain a family. Since the second world war, women, especially married women, have entered the paid labour force in increasing numbers (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978). But women tend to receive wages linked to their unpaid work in the home, segregated into job ghettos. In the fishing industry, new jobs requiring large numbers of workers on assembly lines became 'women's work' (for example, pulling herring roe). In other words, as Chinese men disappeared from the industry, women filled the slots for large numbers of casual workers. And the work formerly done by native women (such as cleaning fish) continued to be done by women.

The development of the forces of production within the fish processing industry also enabled canners to close remote plants and consolidate facilities in or near urban centres. The growth of cities enabled them to recruit the labour of women. Women from native communities had to either move to the cities or lose employment. As more and more plants in the central and northern areas closed in the 1950s and 1960s, native communities lost an important source of income and became ever more dependent on state aid for survival.

The welfare state has also resulted in the state becoming more directly involved in the economy, in capital accumulation. And the economic, political and ideological levels become ever more intertwined. As Panitch has noted, in Canada, the federal state has always been directly involved in capital accumulation. However, its evolution after the second world war forced it to take on increased legitimization functions, as it was forced to negotiate with capital and labour, making concessions to the latter. The functions of the provincial states also

changed. Some, especially British Columbia, became increasingly coercive in their relations with organised labour (Milner, 1977: 88). The provincial states also became more heavily involved in capital accumulation, as resources under provincial control became increasingly valuable (Stevenson, 1977: 86 and 108).

Before the 1930s, social legislation in Canada was minimal (Finkel, 1977: 346). While the federal state was able to restrict trade union activity during the depression, it was unable to stem it during the war years. At the same time, trade unionists changed their recruitment policies and began to organise mass-production industries, many under state control for the war effort. The switch from organising skilled craft workers to industrial workers swelled membership rolls. "Government labour policies during the war were extremely repressive. But it proved impossible to prevent unionization under wartime conditions of full employment and even labour shortages" (ibid.: 358).

The organised labour movement demanded participation not only at the industrial (economic) level, but also at the political.

Collective bargaining was not just a means of raising wages and improving working conditions. It was a demand by organized workers for a new status, and the right to participate in decision making both in industry and government...Eventually this demand for a new status in society, was met by the introduction of a new legislative framework for collective bargaining which has been modified only slightly since that time (MacDowell, 1978: 175).

While craft workers had always been able to negotiate on the basis of their skills, many mass-production workers did not possess skills acknowledged as valuable by employers. This made legal recognition of trade unions in these industries crucial. The fact that the federal state had guaranteed production in many of these industries, including

the B.C. fisheries, for the war effort caused it to intervene directly. While it voluntarily agreed to hold wages at fixed levels, it was less willing to negotiate with labour. This led to a number of strikes in key industries in Ontario (such as steel) and the election of the CCF as the official opposition in that province. The federal government capitulated in February, 1944, with order-in-council P.C. 1003, legalising trade unions.

It has been viewed as a turning point in the development of our industrial relations system since it became a model for post-war legislation...It guaranteed the right to organize and bargain collectively, establishing a procedure for the certification and compulsory recognition of trade unions with majority support, recognized the exclusive bargaining agency principle, defined unfair labour practices, provided for remedies, and outlawed company unions (*ibid.*: 194).

The B.C. fishing industry was involved in the heightened labour unrest of the 1930s and war years. Fishers became aware that craft organisations based on type of gear used in fishing served to divide them in negotiations with canners, unified through the Salmon Cannery's Operating Committee, which negotiated on behalf of most canneries in the industry. In the early 1940s they created an industrial union, and began to recruit shoreworkers as well as fishers. In 1945, union organisers used the new legislation to create the UFAWU, and, for the first time, labour legislation was systematically applied within salmon canneries.

Throughout the period from 1907 to 1934, the Province clearly had the constitutional authority to regulate labour in the fish-processing and fish-canning sectors; yet the application of the various Factory Acts, Hours of Work Acts, and Minimum Wage Acts all explicitly excluded protection and regulation in the fish canning sector, and the Workmen's Compensation Act seems to have been applied such that Asian and Indian labour had unequal access (Garrod, 1984: 17).

Legislation by itself serves no function. It must be translated into regulations and enforced. The provincial state enacted racist legislation continually in the post-confederation period. But much of it was blocked at the federal level, and also challenged by the groups against which it was directed. While Chinese, Japanese and East Indian Canadians had no voice politically, they could still negotiate with the federal state by putting pressure on diplomats and consuls from China, Japan and India. And Canada had to maintain friendly relations with these states, and was thus forced to make concessions.

While labour legislation was drafted, as long as the Chinese contract system was operative, it was not enacted for the majority of shoreworkers. It was only through the struggle of workers that it came into effect. This forms the topic of the next chapter.

¹ For example, in the 1891 fisheries report, the Deputy Minister noted members of the Cannery Association sent a long "remonstrance" urging the removal of limits on fishing licences on the Fraser river, and arguing each cannery be allowed at least twenty-five boat licences. "On the other hand, the department believes to grant the cannery's request would create a monopoly" (DMF, 1892: lxii). Salmon cannerys organized collectively well before the twentieth century, changing their name in 1951 from the Salmon Cannerys' Operatating Committee to the Fisheries Association to reflect their expanding interests which now involved other fisheries besides salmon and other processing techniques besides canning.

² He may be worth re-stating here that racism refers to structured inequality whereby a group is discriminated against on a number of levels (political, economic, ideological, social) on the basis of skin colour and racial affiliation.

³ Bonacich (1979) makes a similar argument, as noted in the introductory chapter here.

⁴ This is a major difference between European single men and their Chinese and Japanese counterparts. In the early period, European men also left their families in their countries of origin, and thus wages could technically cover only their own needs. However, the European working class had been struggling over the concept of a "family wage" for over a century, and European immigrant men bargained with employers on this basis. In turn, this reflected different relations of production in the countries of origin of the various groups, as well as power relations between the Canadian federal and provincial states and those of other countries.

CHAPTER 7

The Development of Class Consciousness through Trade Union Organisation

The analysis thus far may have a deterministic quality to it. Salmon canners, in developing a capitalist industry, made the best of the circumstances presented to them. They secured a proletarian labour force without paying it the full costs of its production and reproduction. While engaging in a capitalist enterprise, they nevertheless used pre-capitalist relations of production to secure cheap wage labour. And they appear to have had the upper hand in their dealings with their factory labour forces. As long as the Chinese contract system was in full operation, shoreworkers appear to have had little influence with their employers. In effect, their employers consisted of both middlemen contractors and salmon canners. When Chinese employees did organise, in 1904, by forming the Chinese Cannery Employees' Union, their purpose was to deal with contractors who left for China after being paid by the cannery operators, without paying their labourers (Gladstone, 1959: 296-297). Use of contractors enabled employers to stay out of labour negotiations. And, when Chinese labourers began to request higher wages after the turn of the century, salmon canners responded by mechanising those processes involving

skilled Chinese labourers, and substituting more docile labourers in new tasks that developed around the exploitation of new fisheries and the development of new processing techniques. As the urban population began to expand, a new supply of labour became available, in the form of newly immigrant women, like the Japanese, and, later, East Indian women (also Italian and Portuguese).

In the early part of the twentieth century, groups like the Chinese and Japanese were struggling on the political front. Within the salmon canneries, employers appear to have been successful in keeping groups divided along racial and gender lines. Threats to jobs were thus perceived as threats from other labouring groups, like women or the Chinese, rather than originating from the structure of the industry. Indeed the political climate in British Columbia encouraged such reasoning, as demonstrated in the last chapter. However, in the 1930s, this climate began to change, both in the wider provincial political arena and in the labour relations in fish plants.

Unlike the salmon canning crews, fishers had a history of militant organisation, stemming to well before the turn of the century (Gladstone, 1959; Ralston, 1965). It was the European fishers who used the idea of union organisation to organise struggle with salmon canners. Native fishers were erratic in the weapons they used, since they retained relations of production pre-dating capitalism and made use of these relations to press their demands. These sometimes came into conflict with those of European fishers, especially over native fishing rights to the resources. In the early period, Japanese fishers were employed under contract to undermine the autonomy of both European and

native fishers. Cannerymen, at the start of the industry, had tried to secure native fishers as wage labourers. Although the practice continued for a longer period of time in the north, where licencing also lasted for a longer period than on the Fraser, native fishers appear to have resisted this form of proletarianisation. The fishing industry, until the end of the second world war, was marked by racial conflicts that divided fishers. Another source of division was the type of gear used to capture the resource. Gillnetters, seiners, and trollers often saw their interests in terms of the method of capture rather than uniting across gear types. These divisions are still prevalent today. Finally, class interests also proved divisive. Some fishers were able to earn considerable incomes and began operating as small-scale capitalists, employing boat crews as wage labourers or on a share basis. Again, gear type was a factor, as was the particular fishery or fisheries one prosecuted.

Despite all of these conflicts, fishers were generally far more militant than shoreworkers. They had a measure of independence, since they bargained each season directly with cannerymen over the price of fish, while seasonal cannery labourers had little, if any, contact with them. Most of the struggles shoreworkers initially undertook were in support of fishers. This was especially marked in areas where fishers and cannery crews were related; for example, where both groups came from the same villages. In the 1930s, fishers became more militant, as did shoreworkers. The latter would support fishers' demands, and, if successful, would sometimes receive concessions for themselves.

Thus, it is not surprising that fishers, with the help of trade union organisers affiliated with the Communist Party, undertook to organise shore plants, particularly since industrial organisation gave fishers an added weapon in negotiations with canners. And, in the early period, the interests of fishers predominated within the union. However, gradually shoreworkers themselves began to organise around issues important to their conditions as wage labourers. This chapter explores the relationship between fishers and shoreworkers within the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union (the UFAWU), and traces the evolution of class consciousness among shoreworkers.

There are and have been a number of other organisations important to various groups of cannery workers, especially the Native Brotherhood. Attention will focus, however, on the UFAWU, for two reasons. First, an analysis of this type has never been done and is important to understanding the industry and the nature of the class struggles that have taken place within it. Second, since the thesis concentrates on the salmon canning industry, it is appropriate to examine the trade union organisation most important to it. Other organisations will be mentioned only within this context.

Unionisation of Shoreworkers¹

As noted, shoreworkers were a relatively unorganised labour force, compared to fishers, who had established a number of strong craft unions. The UFAWU was the product of a number of earlier fishers' unions. Following a strike in 1931 in Barkley Sound by unorganised salmon seiners and gillnetters, the Fishermen's and Cannery Workers'

Industrial Union was formed. In 1935, the union signed fish price and cannery agreements with the Deep Bay Fishing and Packing Company for the Deep Bay cannery located on Vancouver Island, but the agreements terminated the following year with the demise of the union. It was reorganised in 1936, and two separate unions emerged, the Salmon Purse Seiners Union of the Pacific (SPSU) and the Pacific Coast Fishermen's Union (PCFU) (North, 1974: 9-22). In 1937, they jointly founded the union paper, The Fisherman, to provide a forum in which further organisation among fishers could be encouraged. In 1940, the SPSU joined with the United Fishermen's Federal Union (UFFU) (The Fisherman, 1940: March 26, 1). The UFFU was itself the product of a number of earlier unions which underwent several name changes in the 1930s. In 1941, the PCFU merged with the UFFU (1941: March 25, 1). That same year the UFFU helped found the Fish Cannery, Reduction Plant and Allied Workers' Union, or Local 89, as it came to be called. The UFFU shared office space with Local 89 and gave it financial assistance. The two could not unite because the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada insisted on a separate charter before it would grant jurisdiction for the organisation of shoreworkers (1941: July 15, 1). Both unions were affiliated with the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (VTLC). The Trades and Labour Congress finally agreed to grant a provincial charter in 1945, when the two unions merged to become the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union (UFAWU) (VTLC, 1945: March 20, 312).

It can be readily seen that the impetus for organising shoreworkers came from fishers. In the late 1930s, they were interested in aiding shore plants organise because it would give them added leverage in

negotiating fish prices. Fishers needed shoreworkers because the key to shutting down the industry lay in closing down the plants. Otherwise, plants could operate by processing catches bought from non-unionised Canadian fishers and from American fishers. However, only a handful of employees were needed to close the plants, those occupying key positions, especially the reduction plant workers and cannery machinemen. In turn, these groups were composed mainly of white men whose interests were similar to those of the unionised fishers (fishers occasionally worked in the plants and vice versa).

Bill Gateman was hired as the shoreworker organiser for Local 89. He proceeded to hire on a piecemeal basis, and thus, initially, union agreements reflected the racial and gender divisions prevalent in the industry. The situation appears to have been common in industries marked by racial and gender divisions of labour. Previous to his appointment to Local 89, Gateman was the Business Agent for the Hotel, Restaurant and Culinary Employees and Bartenders Union, Local 28. There, too, it appears from the minute books that the major portion of organised labour consisted of a small core of white waiters and bus boys (in addition to the bartenders, who appear to have been mostly white males). From there, organisers attempted to recruit waitresses and kitchen workers. Many of the latter were Chinese. They appear to have had limited success. For example, the Business Agent's report at the July 17, 1938, meeting recorded: "Restaurant Owners oppose the inclusion of cooks in the agreement. This question was discussed for quite a while; and a motion made to take a secret vote on whether the members are in favor of accepting the agreement without the Cooks.

Result of ballots showed 29 Yes, 18 No." A motion was moved, seconded, and unanimously carried to sign the agreement, with a recommendation that every effort be made "by all members to organising the Chinese" (Local 28: 139). Earlier that year, in March, a delegation of Local 31, Japanese Camp and Mill Workers, a union composed entirely of Japanese labourers, approached Local 28. Both locals were affiliated with the VTLC. Local 31 requested that Local 28 include Japanese employees in its new agreements. "After discussing the whole matter in a frank way, the Executive decided that our policy is that we cannot guarantee employment for Japanese employees in the new Hotel" (*ibid.*: 120). The hotel referred to was the newly constructed Hotel Vancouver. Distinctions based on race were a common feature in all industries employing large numbers of labourers from specific racial groups, and they inevitably posed problems for union organisers.

Gateman began to organise Vancouver Island plants first. As early as 1937, Deep Bay cannery had a union agreement. The leading edge of Local 89's organisation campaign was the Kildonan cannery and reduction plant, and, by August, 1941, every plant along the west coast of Vancouver Island had established locals (The Fisherman, 1941: Aug. 5 and 19, 4; Sept. 2, 2; 1942: Mar. 31, 1-2). The operation of reduction plants became very lucrative during the war years. These plants, generally situated next to canneries, were mechanised, operated by a small number of employees tending machinery.

When labourers other than cannery machinemen and reduction plant workers asked to join the union, Gateman tried to establish separate locals for them. The companies, however, refused to negotiate with

them. Initially, the unions attempted the strategy of joint production boards, lobbying the federal government for a board to plan production and prices for the war effort on a joint basis, including representatives from the government, the UFFU and Local 89, and the Salmon Cannery Workers' Operating Committee (SCOC). Local 89 offered to guarantee a "no strike policy" in return for a seat on the board. The unions pointed out "there had actually been times when through the medium of the cannery workers' organization, they had acted as a restraining force against spontaneous strikes in the plants in order to bring about amicable negotiations on wage questions with the operators concerned" (1942: Feb. 17, 1). The federal government flatly refused, forcing Local 89 to negotiate separate plant agreements. The policy of Local 89 was then narrowed to focus upon the reduction plants and key cannerymen.

The union has always been willing; in fact, would prefer, to conduct negotiations only for the steady employees. While it is true our proposed agreement did cover casual labour and female labour which is seasonal and consequently very transient, this was done because a large number of the female employees who worked in canneries last year are members of the union and wish to be represented by it but we do not propose to represent the majority of this class of labour (1942: May 26, 1).

The spontaneous strikes referred to above had escalated during the 1930s, as fishers expressed increasing discontent over negotiations with cannerymen, and shoreworkers often supported their demands. The Deep Bay cannery was organised in this manner. Until the 1930s, the wages and working conditions of shoreworkers had not improved substantially from those at the turn of the century. They worked short seasons, long hours, and continued to be paid as little as 15 cents per hour (1937:

July 31, 1).² There was no minimum wage act to cover them. Their only recourse to protest conditions when they became unbearable was to organise a spontaneous strike. However, these strikes were sporadic and isolated. Many were fought in order to attain parity with wages and conditions at nearby plants. If one cannery went on strike, fish could be processed at a nearby plant.

The war years served to deepen the discontent that surfaced during the depression years. Salmon packs were secured at guaranteed prices and both salmon and herring runs were phenomenal during these years. Cannerymen began to realise substantial profits. They also extended production, not only to other fisheries, like canned herring, but also intensified work on the salmon canning lines. The numbers of seasonal plant workers hired, especially women, increased. And demands by women for better wages, as well as for unionisation, became more frequent. For example, in October 1941, 600 tons of herring were unloaded at Imperial plant, on the Fraser, in one day. Labourers had to work long shifts with no overtime pay. That week, 400 men and women staged a spontaneous strike at Imperial. They voted to return to work the following shift when the company offered them an increase of five cents per hour (bringing women's wages to 40 cents and men's to 50 cents per hour) (1941: Oct. 28, 1; Nov. 18, 4). Only after the dispute was settled did they join the union. This was the pattern during these years. Labourers would become so dissatisfied that they would walk out or strike. Following a settlement, Local 89 would recruit the disgruntled labour forces.

Although "female and common labour" was sacrificed in order that the local could concentrate on organising permanent employees, the excluded groups continued to demand organisation. For example, in October, 1942, a meeting for "all steady, cannery men" was called in Steveston (on the Fraser). So many women packed the hall, that not all could obtain admission. All of the women were turned away. "It was explained that the meeting was specifically called for steady cannery men, whereupon the women and miscellaneous workers asked when it would be possible to hold organisation meetings to enrol them into the Union" (1942: Oct. 27, 4). They were told this would be done in the "near future." In the same issue of The Fisherman, an article noted the government's adoption of the policy of "equal pay for equal work," but fishers were assured that "older unions and males generally do not need to fear that the employment of women will undermine their wages scales."

Although many European fishers and plant workers held racist and sexist ideas about the rights of all labourers to decent wages and working conditions, the unions faced even more formidable opposition from the canners. Employers were resistant to any type of union organisation. However, when they began to realise that the labour movement was gaining strength, and was pressuring various levels of government for trade union recognition and unionised agreements, they tried to restrict organisation to the small handful of permanent employees.

On 28 August 1941, Gateman sent a letter to the SCOC informing the companies of the establishment of the union and requesting a meeting (1941: Dec. 9, 4). Meetings were held in September and November, at

which time the companies demanded formal proof that the union represented a majority of the employees for whom negotiations were in process. The reduction plants were selected as an opening wedge in bargaining with the SCOC, since they had been the focus of the initial campaign and contained a small and stable labour force. When proof of representation was submitted, the companies continued to stall by postponing meetings and generally avoiding dealing with Local 89. In January, 1942, the union applied to the Department of Labour for a conciliation commission under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act (1942: Jan. 6, 4). A conciliator was appointed in February, and in May a reduction plant agreement was signed. It had taken almost one year to negotiate on behalf of 150 permanent employees.³ Local 89 then turned to negotiating for the key cannerymen, and a similar pattern was repeated, requiring the use of a third party to act as conciliator. An agreement retroactive to 1 November 1942 was signed (1942: Nov. 24, 1).

The whole process was repeated the following year. An arbitration award was handed down in August, and Local 89 was successful in establishing an 8 a.m. starting time and extra pay for hours worked beyond the guaranteed 230 per month. However, the employers refused to accept the award, and that season the cannerymen worked without a signed agreement. In 1944, the War Labour Relations Boards were established, easing the union's task. Cannerymen won the nine-hour day, although the 8 a.m. starting time continued to be a bone of contention. Reduction plant workers and cannerymen sought and won a guaranteed month (guaranteed to be paid for a set number of hours per month), a reduction

in the number of hours constituting a guaranteed month, with overtime pay. In order to preserve the guaranteed month, overtime was negotiated at straighttime rates. By 1947, guaranteed hours had been reduced to 192 per month.

Tables III and IV give some indication of the number of canneries and shoreworkers (compared to fishers) for this period of time. In 1944, only a tiny fraction of shoreworkers had union agreements. Women were covered on a plant basis, generally in the fresh fish sector, where they worked as highly skilled filleters, and where their numbers were quite small. Women never received guaranteed monthly hours. Therefore, negotiations on their behalf focussed on wage hikes and the establishment of overtime pay. In 1944, the Vancouver and New Westminster plants of Edmunds and Walker Ltd. signed an agreement containing an overtime clause at time and one-half and wage rates based on a 48 hour, six-day week. This was claimed to be the first such agreement in the history of the Canadian fishing industry (1945: Mar. 15, 1). The work in fresh fish plants was more evenly distributed between the sexes, especially during the war years. It was generally recognised that women were performing the same work as men on the dressing tables and in the freezer rooms, but receiving lower rates of pay (1942: Oct. 27, 4; 1949: May 17, 1). Thus, the principle of equal pay for work of equal value could be called upon, unlike the canning lines, where sex segregation prevailed. Prince Rupert, the centre of the groundfish industry, became an important centre for the organisation of fresh fish workers. Union organisation was made easier because fresh fish plants were concentrated in a small area on the waterfront.

Table III
Number of Canneries in B.C. 1925-1948

| Year | Nass River | Skeena River | Rivers Inlet | Fraser River | Outlying Districts | Total |
|------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------|
| 1925 | 3 | 13 | 11 | 10 | 28 | 65 |
| 1930 | 3 | 11 | 12 | 8 | 25 | 59 |
| 1935 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 13 | 43 |
| 1940 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 10 | 15 | 38 |
| 1945 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 10 | 10 | 29 |
| 1948 | 0 | 7 | 1 | 12 | 7 | 27 |

SOURCE: Department of Fisheries, Ninth Annual Report, 1925-1938;
Nineteenth Annual Report, 1938-1948.

Table IV
Number of Shoreworkers and Fishers in the B.C. Fishing Industry
1936-1947

| Year | Number Employed in Primary Sector (Fishing) | Number Employed in Secondary Sector (Plants) | Total |
|------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1936 | 11,393 | 6,596a | 17,989 |
| 1937 | 11,184 | 5,574b | 16,758 |
| 1938 | 10,314 | 6,103 | 16,417 |
| 1939 | 9,609 | 6,271 | 15,880 |
| 1940 | 10,444 | 7,449 | 17,893 |
| 1941 | 10,217 | 7,914 | 18,131 |
| 1942 | 12,199 | 6,939 | 19,138 |
| 1943 | 11,903 | 6,011 | 17,914 |
| 1944 | 12,426 | 6,150 | 18,576 |
| 1945 | 13,292 | 6,038 | 19,330 |
| 1946 | 13,665 | 6,079 | 19,744 |
| 1947 | 12,461 | 5,473 | 17,934c |

a) Of the 6,596 workers employed in the secondary sector, 3,859 were male and 2,737 were female.

b) Of 5,574 workers, 3,250 were male and 2,324 were female.

c) This was a decrease of 9% over 1946; while employment in the primary sector declined 6%, it declined by 10% in the secondary sector.

SOURCE: British Columbia, Report of the Provincial Fisheries Department, 1937-48.

It was the Native Brotherhood that signed the first agreement covering an entire cannery crew. In 1943, it signed with five companies for plants employing native workers. When the UFAWU began to negotiate on behalf of all cannery employees, the Native Brotherhood tended to adopt the same agreements for its membership, with the UFAWU recognising joint membership for native labourers.

While the Native Brotherhood spearheaded organisation of native cannery workers, Local 89 began a serious attempt to organise an estimated 1200 Chinese cannery workers in May 1944, when a Chinese organiser was hired. A sub-local under his leadership was planned (1944: May 23, 4). He was able to organise approximately 200 workers by recruiting in the Chinese section of Vancouver (1944: June 13, 1). Chinese organisers were appointed until 1949, by which time very few Chinese labourers were left in the industry. An enormous number appear to have disappeared over the space of a few years. In 1946, the organiser estimated between 1000 and 1500 Chinese were employed in the fish canneries, their numbers exceeding those in any other basic industry, with the possible exception of forestry (1946: Sept. 13, 3). He judged the organisational drive in northern canneries that year to be unsuccessful. The Chinese workers expressed concern that agreements covering themselves and women had not been signed. They also questioned the union's strategy of organising on a sectional rather than on a plant-wide basis (UFAWU, 1946: Vol. 190, p. 2 of letter dated Aug. 19). In 1948, the organiser estimated Chinese labour had been reduced between

30 and 35 percent. Many had returned to China and many were elderly. However, the organiser attributed the main reason for the decline to be the companies' avowed policy in being more selective in hiring Chinese labourers (UFAWU, 1948: Vol. 190, p.2 of report).

The union opposed the Chinese contract system. In certifying labour, the union would have been forced to negotiate with the contractors, since they paid the labour force. The union could only bargain for them with the SCOC when they were placed on company payrolls (UFAWU 1947: Vol. 190, letter dated March 18). However, provincial labour legislation was being enacted forcing employers to list their employees by name and pay them directly. The SCOC saw the writing on the wall, and, in 1947, advised the companies to accept UFAWU certification. "This Agreement, which is now ready for signature, is an entirely new departure from the practice in effect for so many years respecting the employment of Chinese workers. It is our view that these workers should be considered as direct employees of the company, and, in fact, this is the ruling of the Provincial Department of Labour" (J. H. Todd, 1947: Box 21, letter dated June 24). Forced to recognise Chinese workers as employees covered by union agreements, many companies stopped employing them (J. H. Todd, 1948: Box 21, letter dated June 17).

Despite union certification, the Chinese contract system was not abolished. Rather, it was modified to meet provincial standards. Contractors continued to recruit seasonal labour, and to provide for its direct supervision. The foremen, or "China bosses," were not placed on the cannery payroll but were paid directly through the company's head office (J. H. Todd, 1947: Box 21, letter No. 21 dated July 8). The

consequence for Chinese workers was that they were now covered by two contradictory systems. Under the old Chinese contracts, although their wages were substandard, they were hired and paid for the entire season. Many workers also depended on contractors finding them work during the rest of the year. Union agreements did not sever this relationship. However, under UFAWU agreements, they lost their seasonal guarantees, although the union managed to secure monthly guarantees (UFAWU, 1948: Vol. 190, notes dated July 15-Aug. 20). And when employees came directly on the payroll, employers began to pick and choose, discarding the more aged workers.

As the various groups of seasonal labourers became certified, they were covered by special supplements to the master agreement. While the master agreement set out general working conditions, the supplements listed wages for specific categories of workers. In 1946, cannery women were first included. The companies distinguished further, keeping the wages and categories of native and white women separate. Thus, while white women were paid by the hour, native women were paid piece rates in jobs like hand filling cans of fish (J. H. Todd, 1947-1949: Box 21 contains cannery agreements for Inverness, Klemtu and Empire canneries). In 1947, agreements covering Chinese cannery labour were first signed, and a separate supplement was drawn up for them. In 1949, they were included in the Male Cannery Workers' Supplement, classified into four groups. While the top wage in Groups I and II was \$245 per month, Chinese labour was paid under Group IV, where the top wage was \$183 per month (*ibid.*: file labelled "1949 questionnaires").

Thus, by 1949, the entire salmon cannery labour force in the province was unionised (providing workers voted for certification, generally the case). However, the divisions salmon canners had introduced to enable them to pay individual groups of labourers as cheaply as that particular group could stand, were incorporated into these first union agreements. Fishers were interested in an industrial union, and the best strategy was to organise the most stable labour force, those workers judged by canners to be indispensable. Without the war and the intervention of the provincial and federal governments in passing legislation and acting as arbitrators, it is unlikely Local 89, and its successor the UFAWU, would have succeeded at all. But it now became the task of union organisers to eradicate racial and gender discrimination contained in union agreements. They began with racial discrimination.

The 1950s: Decade of Company Retrenchment and Passivity among Seasonal Labourers

Evidence of the differing conditions and interests between organised European labour and seasonally employed cheap labour is abundant for the period of the 1950s, when fishers' interests and those of the small core of permanent employees prevailed within the union. However, both the UFAWU and the fishing companies experienced a number of difficulties following the end of the war.

Once the war ended, markets became problematic. In 1948, herring canning ended. It had prolonged employment of seasonal workers since it preceded salmon canning. During the 1930s, companies had begun to close

outlying plants. The trend halted somewhat during wartime prosperity, but resumed after the war. Whereas, in 1944, 6,150 shoreworkers were employed, by 1952, the number fell to 3,947, and continued in the following years (The Fisherman, 1954: June 8, 1). In 1944, there were 31 canneries with 100 canning lines. In 1957, they were reduced to 17 with 58 lines (1958: March 14, 3). Operations were consolidated and centralised near urban centres. The closure of canneries in the north, along the central coast and on Vancouver Island ended employment for many native villages, as evident from the oral histories of native cannery workers given in Chapter 4. The UFAWU began to mobilise seasonal labourers around this issue.

Because native women were proletarianised more radically than native fishers, class consciousness created cleavages within many native households. Generally, native women have been stauncher UFAWU supporters than many of their male kin, who have espoused the causes of native organisations like the Native Brotherhood. While the UFAWU and Native Brotherhood negotiate jointly for collective agreements, the union has focussed on the proletarian interests of shoreworkers and fishers, while the Native Brotherhood has had a wider mandate. Native fishers have interests tied to their aboriginal claims and status. In addition, large boat owners who hire wage labour are members, but are excluded from UFAWU membership. These conflicts have resulted in severe disagreements over the years. For example, the 1952 salmon strike ended after four days to prevent growing disunity and division among fishers. The Native Brotherhood was opposed to strike action, and indicated it would sign agreements with the companies for its members.

Conflicts with native fishers were not the only source of division between fishers and the union. Serious divisions along gear type and capital investment continued to exist. In addition, the legal status of the union in representing vessel owners was challenged several times by anti-combines legislators. They charged fishers were "co-adventurers" and not wage labourers. The strength of the UFAWU in facing such charges was its representation of shoreworkers and tendermen (an intermediate labour force between plant employees and fishers, who transported fish from the grounds to the plants). The American side of the fishing industry had been organised much earlier, but stronger laws decimated those unions after the war ended. By 1952, American organisations were all but decimated, and "the UFAWU was standing alone as the single functioning industrial union anywhere in the fishing industries of North America" (1979: Feb. 2, 10). That same issue of The Fisherman provides a short history of the American and Canadian governments' challenges of fishing unions. In British Columbia, the attacks began in 1952, when two gillnetters unsuccessfully charged the UFAWU was not a trade union before the B.C. Supreme Court. The charge was renewed in 1954, when four gillnetters charged the UFAWU to be an unlawful combine, following a salmon tendermen's strike that year. In 1956, union offices were raided and many documents seized in yet another investigation.

Part of these charges were linked to the political affiliation of the UFAWU leadership. From 1953 to 1973 the union was suspended from the Trades and Labour Congress because of its communist leadership and orientation, part of a wider movement to disbar all Communist Party

affiliated unions. Earlier, in November 1950, two UFAWU executives were barred from the Victoria Trades and Labour Congress because of their political affiliation. Shoreworkers, especially native labourers, struggled over this issue. From the end of the eighteenth century, when the Spanish landed on Vancouver Island, missionaries had been converting the native populations and establishing mission villages in remote areas. Many native peoples had become Christians, and had difficulty accepting leadership from Communist Party members.

All of these problems threatened to tear the union apart. In fact, over the next few decades, splits among fishers were aggravated, while shoreworkers began to organise collectively around their own interests. But, first, these had to be articulated, not simply for the small core of permanent employees, but also for the seasonally employed, since the issues important to the two groups were not necessarily similar.

The most militant shoreworkers were reduction plant workers, cannery machinemen, monthly classified netmen, and fresh fish and cold storage workers. Most of them were men, and many were also fishers. They worked closely together and on a permanent basis, often alternating employment between fishing and work inside the plants. They were the group most closely tied to fishers and thus receptive to their organising efforts. They were also craft workers who could point to disparities between their wages and working conditions with other organised provincial industries. These groups realised significant gains during the 1950s and 1960s. Their guaranteed monthly hours slowly decreased to the equivalent of a forty-hour week. They fought for and won multiple overtime rates. They sought parity with their fellow

tradesmen in other B.C. resource industries. Although reluctant, the Fisheries Association (the SCOC changed its name in the early 1950s) was willing to negotiate better conditions for them. By pressing for percentage increases, this militant sector widened the gap between its wages and those of the general labour and female categories. Ultimately, the Fisheries Association was willing to grant these demands because they represented such a small number of workers. For example, in 1954 the cost of shore requests (a forty-hour week with no reduction in take-home pay) was estimated to represent one-fifth of a cent per quarter-pound can (The Fisherman, 1954: July 13, 1).⁴

Union organisers found the Fisheries Association adamant in refusing to grant any wage increases to seasonally paid women and casual labourers, who formed the greater portion of the labour force. These two groups went without any wage increases for three years, from 1951 to 1953, and faced very different conditions of employment. Guaranteed packs came to an end in 1947, and from that time until the late 1950s, the companies had a difficult time re-establishing domestic markets and finding new outlets. Thus, they had a surplus labour supply and could resist wage demands. In addition, mechanisation occurred throughout the 1950s, allowing canners to close outlying plants and consolidate operations. These plants became multi-product and multi-processing operations, combining diverse processing techniques and product lines in one geographical location in or near an urban centre. Despite such reductions in their numbers, perhaps because they feared employers would replace militant seasonal workers, male casual labourers and cannery women refused to take strike action.

Regardless of all these different interests, the platform upon which the UFAWU was created was democratic. In 1945, for the first time since the creation of the UFFU, women and Chinese labourers were represented among the delegates (1945: Mar. 6, 1). In 1944, Alex Gordon replaced Bill Gateman as shoreworker organiser. Gordon began to attempt to organise and press the demands of seasonal labourers. Beginning in 1950, the union launched a major campaign to end racial discrimination. "We wish to point out...that discrimination on the basis of racial background is a common method used to divide workers" (1950: Feb. 21, 4). "We must not forget the lessons of the past when the fishermen and allied workers were divided along racial, gear and craft lines and the operators were thus able to play one group against the other to the detriment of all" (1953: Jan. 6, 2).

While shoreworkers were reluctant to fight for better wages, they, especially native women, were prepared to fight for other issues, including better company housing and payment of transportation costs to and from the plants. At most plants, accommodation facilities for native people reflected the racial discrimination upon which the industry was built. At Namu (central coast) shore meetings, for example, most of the "beefs" were raised by native women. "The matter of two Native women who came to the plant early and were placed in the regular bunkhouse and were then compelled to move into the separate bunkhouse for Native women later on was raised as an instance of what we consider to be discrimination" (UFAWU, 1956: Vol. 52, minutes of meeting Aug. 28). Organisation among seasonal labourers began with local issues raised at local meetings, providing a forum for discussion of problems

pertinent to specific groups, and giving them a forum in which to develop leadership skills. A symbolic act took place at Namu in 1954, when a meeting of 154 Native Brotherhood and UFAWU cannery workers voted unanimously to remove signs on two adjoining women's rest rooms, one reading "Natives" and the other "Whites." The increasing militancy of native women was reflected when they changed their status within the Native Brotherhood from a Women's Auxiliary to the Native Sisterhood. "We hope and trust the time is not too far distant when every sister will have an equal voice with every brother" (The Fisherman, 1955: April 5,3).

It was not until 1956 that equal treatment of native workers was written into the agreement. Until that time, "guarantees, paid transportation, seniority, and board conditions do not apply to Native women at B.C. fish canneries" (1956: April 17, 7). While Chinese and other male labourers were transported to outlying canneries at company expense, women were assumed to be travelling with male relatives (Japanese women, for example, with their husbands on fishing boats) or to live near the sites, and were responsible for their own means and costs of transportation. In 1949, a small concession had been won. Women sent to northern plants were given a monthly guarantee "with this amount to be payable to all women cannery workers at such plants regardless of the place of hiring" (1950: Mar. 7, 8). Gordon had less success, however, in abolishing piece rates. For example, in 1952, native women were required to fill 346 cans per hour to achieve the minimum wage of 98 cents per hour (1952: Jan. 22, 6). The union was able, however, to institute beginners' rates for this group.⁵

While native women were especially affected by the closures of northern and outlying canneries, women workers generally suffered from company retrenchment policies. While the number of labourers declined, production levels remained constant. High-speed machines were adopted, existing machinery was speeded up, and new machines were introduced, cutting down on the total number of labourers required, especially in the warehouses, can lofts, and on the filling lines. Thus, in the period 1944-1953, there was an estimated 50 percent reduction in the number of women employed.⁶

And it was not only the labour of women on the cannery assembly lines that was affected by speed-ups. In 1953, Prince Rupert filleters were told they must meet production standards, and offered a six cent per hour bonus, if they could surpass the standard required of an experienced filleter (45 pounds of sole, skinned both sides, per hour). The company in question was also contemplating introducing piece work on an incentive bonus plan for picking shrimp or crab where such operations were sizable (1953: May 19, 1). Women had to work more intensively in those areas where their work paced them to the speed of the machine, as well as in those jobs which remained manual operations. Gordon used this to fight for better wages. "Any comment with respect to the type of work done and general conditions under which the women work is unnecessary for anyone familiar with the industry. Certainly, the work is more difficult, wet, and dirty, and with just as much skill required, as work done in the sugar refineries, paper box and bag factories, and meat packing plants." He was negotiating for a general wage increase for women of ten cents per hour. "[I]n what other industry are women

required to display the same skill and strength for the kind of wages paid to experienced filleters and for the type of sporadic employment offered?" (1953: Mar. 3, 1 and 6) However, female plant workers, in the 1950s, did not fare well in terms of wage increases compared to other classifications and to fishers. Employers were opposed to recognising their right to a decent wage, and, given their history of employment as cheap labour, women found it difficult to press demands for higher wages.

While fishers went out on strike year after year, shoreworkers adopted a conciliatory stance. The UFAWU required a two-thirds majority in a strike vote. In 1952, for example, fishers went out four times, resulting in the complete loss of the herring season. The most militant workers were the ones to realise gains. Thus, although Gordon pressed for a ten cent per hour increase in 1953, in the final agreement women received no increases at all, while the skilled cannerymen, netmen and refrigeration engineers did (1953: June 2, 1). Even these were regarded jealously by fishers. "Several fishermen have asked what the proposed increases so far granted to shoreworkers will mean in increased costs to the fishing companies" (1953: June 16, 2). In a tightened economic climate each group sought to protect its own interests. Women did not press their demands, and, as a result, while plans to improve their wages and conditions were formulated, they were often the first to be dropped at the bargaining table.

Beginning in 1952, Gordon began to hold annual wage conferences at the beginning of the year. Male and female cannery workers, networkers, fresh fish and cold storage workers, those in the reduction plants,

steam and refrigeration engineers, watchmen and saltery workers attended on a representational basis. At the first of these conferences, some groups expressed more dissatisfaction than others with existing conditions. The most vocal were the craftsmen. Gordon noted women needed wage increases because living costs had escalated and speed up had occurred. "Among this group, however, it was recognized by the wage conference that dissatisfaction with the rate during the 1951 season was not strongly expressed" (1952: Jan. 22, 1).

Two sets of arguments were used to negotiate with employers. Comparisons were made between craft workers in the fishing industry and those in other basic provincial industries, such as sawmills, logging camps, smelters, pulp and sulfite plants, shipyards and the building trades. Employers were willing to negotiate percentage increases, with the highest paid to trade classifications. Beginning in 1951, however, the union began to insist on equal increases for all classifications (1951: Feb. 20, 1). Company representatives fought against this move, arguing it was not logical and the union should request graduated increases, with the highest rates receiving the best increases (1954: April 20, 1).

This was one way the union attempted to narrow the large gap between monthly-paid craftsmen and seasonally employed, hourly-paid workers. Gordon also advanced a second set of arguments. He insisted wages paid to women be on a par with other organised industries like the bakeries, pulp sulfite plants, B.C. Sugar, American Can Company, distilleries, plywood plants and supermarkets. As late as 1958, women's wages lagged far behind those received in these industries. They also

lagged behind wages received in the much older unionised plants in Alaska and Washington. Companies, on the other hand, insisted on making comparisons with fruit and vegetable cannery workers in the Vancouver and Okanagan areas, certain food packaging plants, laundries, selected classifications in meat packaging plants, certain gold mines, fishworker rates in Nova Scotia, and rates paid to fish workers in Japan and other fish-producing countries (1958: Mar. 14, 3; June 20, 3). Cannery workers insisted on comparing women's wages with those received by workers in unorganised industries.

In 1954, the union finally won equal increases across the board for all shoreworkers, in a two-year agreement. This was also the year in which the forty-hour week was won, effective the following year (1954: Aug. 17, 1). "To our knowledge, no other definitely seasonal groups either in Canada or the U.S. have established the condition" (1955: May 3, 2). In 1956, equal conditions for all racial groups and equality between male and female labourers were cited as key objectives at the initial negotiating meeting for cannery, net and reduction plant workers. They included improved accommodation for natives and the need for nursery and playground facilities for children. The three groups decided to settle their agreements together that year, and a strike was narrowly averted. "And just as shoreworkers have backed fishermen to the limit in their many struggles against the operators, so will the fishing fleet stand solidly by their fellow members of the Union in the shore section of the industry." The final result was another across-the-board increase for all shoreworkers in a two-year agreement. In 1957, a welfare plan was instituted and equal treatment of native

workers was written into the collective agreement (1956: Feb. 14, 1 and 6; July 10, 1 and 6; and July 17, 1). Shoreworkers did not negotiate agreements in 1957, but fishers were involved in five strikes that year. And the companies tried to resolve the net fishers' strike by creating friction between fishers and shoreworkers.

When the net fishers struck in 1957, the companies closed the canneries. They also laid off networkers and monthly employed cannery-men. Fishers had to work on their gear, and the companies hoped this would create internal struggle. But fishers and networkers agreed that fishers work on their own gear, declaring all company gear untouchable by anyone but networkers (1957: July 2, 1). When the strike was settled, the 150 monthly employed shoreworkers remained locked out. A ballot conducted among this group resulted in a 64% vote for a complete walkout, less than the required two-thirds majority. The issue went to conciliation, and shoreworkers lost their pay for that period of time. A split board award ruled that monthly workers were subject to sporadic layoff (1958: Feb. 7, 1).

In 1958, the union was forced to settle for percentage increases, although it insisted on a one-year contract. Following a decade with few if any wage increases, the membership was, by the end of the decade, becoming increasingly militant. Thus, in 1959, union policy was not to sign any agreements unless all agreements covering fishers, tendermen, and shoreworkers were signed at the same time (1959: April 10, 1). That year there was an industry-wide strike in which all groups participated. It was the first general strike in the B.C. fishing industry. It ended

when certain groups began to show signs of weakening. The shore section was the first to weaken.

At the end of the decade, shoreworkers emerged as a much more cohesive group. Their ranks were decimated by plant closures, consolidation and centralisation of operations, mechanisation and speed up on the remaining lines. However, those plant workers who remained had won significant benefits, not so much in terms of wages as in other areas. Especially significant was the institution of seniority rights for the seasonally employed, guaranteeing their rehiring each season. The result was relatively low labour turnover, as can be seen by looking at seniority lists. Racial discrimination was brought into the open and fought. In the decades that followed, demands continued to centre around equality in wages between men and women. In the 1950s, a number of women assumed leadership positions. In 1954, Mickey Beagle was the first woman elected as a UFAWU officer. She was elected second Vice-President by acclamation (1954: April 6, 1). In 1959, she was named a general organiser, a full-time union position. In 1956, Verna Parkins was elected president of the Prince Rupert Shoreworkers local, believed to be the first time a woman headed a local (1956: Jan. 31, 1).

The 1960s and 1970s: Decades of Increased Militancy among Shoreworkers

Although the shore section was the first to weaken during the 1959 general strike, the strike itself marked a turning point. Fishers, tendermen and shoreworkers began to insist on negotiating all agreements concurrently, thereby weakening the ability of companies to play one group against the others; for example, by claiming fishers had

negotiated fish prices too highly and employers could not afford to give increases to tendermen or shoreworkers. At the same time, as all three groups began to negotiate collectively, shoreworkers began developing strategies to press their interests within the union, and the strength of that sector began to grow over the next decades.

The companies continued to employ tactics to weaken the unionised membership. As shoreworkers became more militant, cannery made a point of hiring large numbers of casual employees, often students, during the period when a strike vote was being conducted. Thus, in 1962, 53.1% of the plant workers voted to strike. Within the various categories, however, 74.4% of fresh fish and cold storage workers voted to strike. Numbers of cannery workers voting was inflated by an extra 897 workers hired (compared to 1959) to cope with the large run of pink salmon. Gordon insisted these people had little if any previous experience. By holding a strike vote at this particular time, the combined cannery, net and reduction classifications voted only 47.8% for strike action (1962: July 30, 1). The following year, in 1963, the industry witnessed a second general strike. While shoreworkers voted to accept a conciliation award, the Fisheries Association turned it down.⁷ Once again, the companies hired a large number of workers for one or two days during the voting period, but this time they were unsuccessful in preventing a strike vote. The companies responded by threatening to close down for the season. While shoreworkers and tendermen settled,

the net fleet sailed without an agreement. The issues were referred to a one-man arbitration committee leading to the appointment, in 1964, of a federal-provincial committee to examine the entire issue of negotiations over fish prices. It recommended compulsory arbitration.

The threat of compulsory arbitration dampened the desire of net fishers to strike the following year. The numerous fishers' strikes over the last few years aggravated tensions among them, reflected in poor attendance at union meetings. Fishers would not have realised any gains in 1964 if shoreworkers and tendermen had not voted to cancel their newly negotiated agreements to support the demands of the net fleet. A crisis was brewing among fishers, and it erupted two years later.

Shoreworkers were not the only group to be affected by mechanisation. The introduction of brine systems on fish packers resulted in the total elimination of tendermen from herring packers. More labourers were eliminated when air pumps were introduced to mechanically unload fish from packers and fish boats, until then the most manually intensive job for tendermen. The labour force was further reduced with the adoption of refrigerated packers, and the increased use of contracted tug boats and refrigerated trucks to transport catches. Historically the smallest of the three sectors, by the 1970s, tendermen were fighting for the survival of their trade.

These technological changes also affected the fishing fleet. New refrigeration systems as well as improved engines and electronic equipment influenced the emergence of a big boat fleet. Combination

boats emerged. These combined gears (for example, gillnetting and seining) with fisheries (for example, salmon and herring). The development of a fresh/frozen market stimulated the groundfish industry, historically associated with the emergence of large trawlers on both the Atlantic and Pacific. The economic slump of the 1950s in the fisheries lifted in the next decade. While some fishers plowed their profits into their vessels and became small capitalists, canners began to look for new fisheries to exploit. B.C. Packers began to expand its groundfish processing operations. In 1962, the Weston food conglomerate took control and B.C. Packers began to expand its groundfish operations from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

The UFAWU viewed both developments, the increasing importance of the big boat fleet over which it held no jurisdiction (any vessel owner employing more than two crew members could not belong to the union), and the exploitation of groundfish operations by B. C. Packers, with great alarm. In January, 1967, the UFAWU began a disastrous attempt to organise trawl fleets in the Maritime provinces. Negotiations ended in 1970 with a seven-month strike against Booth and Acadia Fisheries. The companies threatened to close the plants, declaring them to be uneconomical. Fishers lost an entire season, workers lost their jobs, and the UFAWU was driven from the area.

In the same period of time, the union was trying to gain readmission to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The CLC would only readmit the UFAWU if it affiliated with an existing charter member. Mergers with two affiliates were contemplated, to gain admission to the CLC but also in the belief that the only way to challenge the giant food

conglomerates was through a strong national union of food workers, just as in the provincial fishing industry strength lay in an industrial union. Negotiations with other unions failed over the question of autonomy for the UFAWU and exercise of power within such an alliance. Nevertheless, in 1973, the CLC agreed to readmit the UFAWU, on condition that it relinquish its organisational attempts on the Atlantic coast.

The UFAWU made a similar attempt to organise groundfish operations on the Pacific coast. The two gear types involved in these operations, trawl and longline, were organised in a separate union. Until 1966, the UFAWU concentrated on organising net fishers (gillnets and seines). The UFAWU thus became embroiled with a number of other organisations. It fought with the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union (DSFU, A CLC affiliate) over representation of longline crews sailing out of Prince Rupert. Many of these vessels, in turn, belonged to members of the Prince Rupert Fishing Vessel Owners Association (PRFVOA). And the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op had a large number of big vessel owners who belonged to this association. In this way, the Co-op became involved in the dispute with the UFAWU, a dispute which polarised the community of Prince Rupert. And shoreworkers found themselves in the middle of the ensuing struggle.

The strike which resulted hinged on the cooperation of shoreworkers to refuse to handle fish caught in unorganised bottoms. This was precisely the reason shoreworkers had been organised in an industrial union, and the outcome of the battle lay in their hands. On March 23, 1967, the Supreme Court granted the PRFVOA an injunction against Prince Rupert shoreworkers who refused to handle "hot" fish. A coastwide ballot was held among UFAWU members on April 3, and the resulting

decision was not to send a telegram ordering Prince Rupert shoreworkers to handle "unfair" vessels. The strikes were justified in terms of the expansion of salmon canners into other major fisheries.

Refusal by the Association [PRFVOA] to negotiate a trawl agreement and the abrupt lockout of longliners are being linked with the major expansion of the B.C. trawl fishery, reflected in a better than 100 percent increase in landings in the past three years, and plans by major monopolies in the industry to enter the trawler field on a large scale (1967: April 14, 12).

Vessel owners in the groundfish industry organised the PRFVOA, and also expanded operations into the net fisheries, through the Co-op, constructing a salmon cannery. Thus, just as the big fishing companies were expanding from salmon canning to other fisheries and processing techniques, organised large vessel owners in the north were expanding from the groundfish industry to the older established salmon and salmon canning industries. The UFAWU found itself challenged simultaneously from two fronts.

As mentioned, the brunt of the strike fell on Prince Rupert shoreworkers. The UFAWU had no effective way of preventing big vessels from fishing. The only way to block them was to refuse to unload their catches at the plants, and to refuse to supply them with ice and bait. This proved extremely effective. However, it also polarised the community. Wives of big vessel owners formed their own organisation, called the "Marching Mothers," holding parades and generally waging a campaign against the union. The female membership of the UFAWU issued the following statement in response to the "Marching Mothers:" "We are the Allied part of the letters. Some of us are wives of fishermen and all of us are shoreworkers" (1967: June 30, 5).

Employers threatened to deport those shoreworkers who were immigrants and/or foreign-born. On May 24, 1967, a Co-op worker issued the following broadcast over a local radio station: "UFAWU trawlers and longliners have declared Rupert Vessel Owners' boats unfair, therefore, we won't touch them or any other 'hot' fish coming from them" (May 26, 4). On June 2, shoreworkers closed down the entire Co-op plant, declaring it unfair. Co-op and PRFVOA vessels then tried to unload their catches at B.C. Packers' Seal Cove plant and at the Royal Fisheries' plant, with resulting plant walkouts. The UFAWU then set up pickets at the Co-op plant. The DSFU retaliated by picketing Seal Cove and Atlin plants, declaring the UFAWU unfair. Injunctions were invoked. Jack Nichol, the union's business agent who replaced Alex Gordon as shoreworker organiser, was arrested twice. The UFAWU president and secretary treasurer were eventually jailed for ten months. Vessel owners launched legal suits against the union to the amount of a quarter of a million dollars in damages.

The dispute ended in July, when the DSFU and the UFAWU worked out a jurisdictional agreement. However, the strike ended without any negotiations made on behalf of the shoreworkers who had supported the strike and refused to cross picket lines. Eight employees at Royal Fisheries were rehired after a 30-day "cooling-off" period, and in early September, their seniority was restored. However, irreconcilable differences had developed at the Co-op. Approximately 50 shoreworkers there supported the strike, and the UFAWU attempted to have their seniority rights restored. Co-op management demanded a 13-month "cooling-off" period during which time seniority would not be

recognised. This meant they would lose employment during the fall, winter and spring. Eventually, a formula was negotiated. Ten displaced workers were to be reinstated in January, 1968, ten more in March, and the rest would be called from the list of the "outside group" in the order of their original seniority. They would be fully re-instated September 1, 1968, having lost their seniority for the summer months. The formula was never implemented.

In February, 1968, the shoreworkers and office employees at the Co-op plant voted to decertify the UFAWU. While 104 employees voted for decertification, none of the 50 were allowed to vote. The Co-op kept the most militant workers out of the plant, replacing them with workers intimidated by the possibility of facing a similar fate should they prove militant. Royal Fisheries also held a vote, deciding to keep the union. The DSFU took over from the UFAWU at the Co-op and created what amounted to a company union, the Amalgamated Shoreworkers and Clerks Union (ASCU). On November 6, 1968, Co-op employees waged a six-hour strike, demanding the seniority rights of the "outside group" be cancelled. They won their demand. The divisions among Co-op shoreworkers were based on support of vessel owners (some shoreworkers were related to them) versus support of the union. Both groups supported fishers, but divided along class lines, not in terms of class interests based on their own working conditions, but those of the fishers with whom they allied themselves. In the end, shoreworkers were the real losers, because neither the Co-op nor the UFAWU took much action to help them once the fishers' strike was terminated. Just as in the 1930s, shoreworkers identified their interests first with fishers.

In the long run, however, the strike provided an important learning experience, teaching shoreworkers how to become militant, even if it was someone else's war.

The experience of the ASCU serves to highlight the importance of an industrial union in the fisheries covering the entire province. Most of its agreements have mirrored those negotiated between the UFAWU and the Fisheries Association. However, on June 23, 1978, the Co-op locked out its 500 employees. The main issue was protection of seniority rights. The Co-op offered a ten cent per hour wage increase (over the general industry settlement) if employees agreed to replace departmental seniority with seniority based on job function. The Co-op sought injunctions against the use of pickets at its Prince Rupert and Vancouver plants. Vancouver plants involved UFAWU members, 30 of whom respected these pickets, but much hard feeling developed between members of the two unions. The B.C. Labour Relations Board upheld the right of the ASCU to picket on the grounds that the union had little or no leverage outside this strategy. The strike ended seven weeks' later when shoreworkers narrowly voted (58%) to accept the proposal they had already rejected three times. The Prince Rupert press attacked the ASCU's business agent, causing her to resign after five years of service. A union formed within one plant with considerable pressure from the employer is virtually ineffective in an industry such as this. The history of union organisation, or, rather, the lack of it among shoreworkers in the Atlantic fisheries, where laws were enacted preventing extensive regional representation, supports this conclusion.

The UFAWU almost destroyed itself in its attempts to widen its jurisdiction. While conflicts among fishers continued, shoreworkers became an ever more cohesive group, finally uniting over the issue to end sexual discrimination in wages and job classifications.

As early as 1954, the provincial government passed an "equal pay for equal work" bill, but the Fisheries Association flatly refused to incorporate the principle into the 1954 agreement. Like similar federal legislation enacted during the war years, the provincial bill was ineffective because there were no provisions for enforcement. In 1968, Mickey Beagle, a UFAWU general organiser, presented a brief to the hearings of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, outlining the cumulative results of the use by companies of women as a cheap source of labour. An experienced female general fish worker received 9.3% less than an inexperienced male worker, and 24.5% less than an experienced male employed in the same category. A fully qualified filleter received \$2.34 per hour (and had to pass tests as well as meet production standards to earn this rate), while inexperienced male help received \$2.37 an hour. Helen O'Shaughnessy, Vice President for shoreworkers, noted: "Women generally perform much of the key production line work,...and are affected directly by speed-up and intensification of work loads" (1968: May 3, 9). The report concluded stronger provincial equal pay legislation was necessary, with enforcement of provisions that the minimum pay for women not be less than the general female labour rate in the same industry. In addition, a clear definition of "equal work" was required, since work performed by women could be entirely different from work performed by men, but still be equal in value; that

is, it could be equal in training time, skills, hours of work, production, intensity, and necessity to overall production.

The difference in work performed by men and women is not in the skills [but in] the fact that there is some heavy work performed by men that women are not physically able to do. This does not mean that work performed by women is not equal - it simply means that at times it is not the same.

In the late 1960s, women became more aggressive in pressing for equal conditions of employment and pay. Many of them were losing their jobs. Plant closures at Klemtu on the Nass, and on the Fraser and Skeena rivers, in 1969, resulted in an estimated 1000 jobs being eliminated in shore plants that year. The 12 canneries operating in 1968 were reduced to five by 1971, with a loss of 1600 jobs. In 1968, the salmon cannery at Namu, the only cannery operating on the coast between the lower mainland and the northern area, was closed. The native village of Bella Bella was left without its major source of income, a fate shared with the village of Klemtu (the cannery there was originally built on the reserve to take advantage of native labour). Most of these plant closures affected native shoreworkers and fishers more severely than other groups.

As native women became more militant, they also became a less attractive labour force to employers. Just as women had replaced Chinese labourers during the second world war, especially in new jobs created by diversification, in the 1970s a similar displacement occurred in a new fishery, roe herring.

By the 1960s, Japan had overfished its own stocks and began searching for new sources of supply. B.C. companies encouraged Japanese interest in provincial waters. The roe was originally extracted from

salmon, but the lucrative market lay in herring. Traditional net gear types could be used since gillnetters and seiners already captured salmon and herring. The new development in labour occurred on the shore with a distinct section in plants established to pull the eggs. Since the herring operation preceded salmon, this could serve to extend seasonal employment of women, and here is where the struggle ensued.

In the early 1960s, Japanese capitalists began to import labourers from Japan. Originally, 40 Japanese technicians were brought from Japan to work at the Coal Harbour whaling station, jointly owned by B.C. Packers and a Japanese firm. The companies claimed Canadian workers were not skilled in butchering whale meat for human consumption. The UFAWU charged that these skills could easily be taught to Canadian labourers. While this particular operation was short-lived, the practise continued in other processing operations. Labourers from Japan were brought to work in the sea urchin roe fishery on Vancouver Island. However, the controversy exploded in the late 1960s over the lucrative salmon and herring roe industries. In 1969, the UFAWU applied to the federal minister of manpower and immigration to prevent the import of workers from Japan to labour in salmon roe operations. The application was ignored as even more technicians were brought to work in the herring roe fishery. Between 1971 and 1978, an estimated 400 working permits were granted. Union members suspected these workers were paid much lower wages. Use of a foreign labour force was seen by the union as one means of trying to introduce a cheap and unorganised labour force into a new industry.

Another tactic used by the companies to lower wages was to substitute men with women. "Until a few years ago salmon eggs were regarded as 'waste' and discarded with the rest of the offal. Whenever the eggs were needed for bait they were pulled out of the fish by men" (1971: Jan. 26, 6). However, once a large market was found for the roe, only women were assigned to these operations. Employers claimed women's fingers were more agile than those of men, and, therefore, women were more suited to the work. The women asked for the same rate of pay as the men had received for pulling eggs. The companies refused. The women, although said to be more suited to the work, received wages four cents above the base rate paid to women, or 34 cents an hour less than the rate paid to men (ibid.).

Early in 1972, the herring roe operation expanded, with 85 boats participating. A number of fishers made fortunes, and the companies realised substantial profits. Shoreworkers, however, did not share in the "bonanza." While a large number of women received several weeks of extra work, herring roe processing was introduced during an existing agreement, and the companies refused to negotiate wages or conditions in the new operation in either the 1972 or 1973 seasons. In the meantime, herring fishers won a price increase of 140%, and herring tendermen also negotiated for the new fishery, winning substantial increases. This issue was a major factor in fuelling dissatisfaction among shoreworkers. The problem was compounded because of the nature of the operation. It was largely manual and could be contracted to small, unorganised firms. Many of these sprang up overnight, and some of the larger companies

contracted this operation to them. The UFAWU called on fishers to deliver their catches only to organised plants.

By 1972, women were also feeling the effect of negotiations carried on over a number of years based on percentage increases. Increases made that year left women with a pay hike three cents an hour lower than that received by men. Women working in fresh fish operations received an increase six cents below that paid to men. Their base rate in 1972 was \$2.89 per hour, while men received a base rate of \$3.87 per hour (1972: Jan. 21, 4).

By 1973, many developments had combined to make shoreworkers militant. Jobs were a primary consideration. Japanese demand created a lucrative fresh/frozen market and diverted salmon from the can to the freezer, eliminating many jobs in the process, since freezing is less labour intensive than canning. New operations, like roe popping, were designated women's work, with corresponding low rates of pay. Where feasible, the operations were contracted to unorganised firms using even cheaper labour. For example, in 1975, a plant in Tofino on Vancouver Island tried to export its frozen herring to Mexico for processing. Sixty UFAWU shoreworkers were laid off when they refused to load 250 tons of the fish into freezer trucks. A Japanese company had invested in this plant, and had also purchased one in Mexico. Wages there were \$1.20 per hour, compared to \$4.50 in Tofino. The union was successful in having legislation enforced preventing a company from exporting more than 25 percent of its total landings in a raw form (1975: May 16, 12). Meanwhile, CANFISCO was financing the development of techniques to process herring roe mechanically.

Women employed in fresh fish plants were also dissatisfied. B.C. Packers' expansion into Atlantic groundfish operations resulted in reduction of operations on the Pacific, pursued only in years when substantial profits could be made. Women in fresh fish operations had traditionally received the most secure employment, and were now subject to sporadic employment. Conversely, the opening of the Japanese market to provincial fish and fish products, enhanced by the two-hundred mile limit, meant many fishers were receiving good incomes. In 1973, shoreworkers finally took matter in hand and went on strike.

The union proposes to delete all contract references to women and simply list classifications and the pertinent wage rates. As a union whose shoreworker membership numbers women in the majority, the UFAWU has a responsibility to establish a lead in a fight for equal rights for working women and equal pay for work of equal value (1973: Mar. 30, 12).

The central issue in 1973 negotiations was not wages, but the introduction of a single cannery schedule. The Fisheries Association agreed to merge the two cannery supplements, to list job classifications by labour groups, to standardise rates, and to raise the lower paid classifications by 15 cents over two years, in addition to any general hourly increases. But it proposed to do this by employing men at wages below those they currently earned. "Clearly, the union's aim is to raise the level of the rates paid to women and not to depress male wage rates" (1973: April 27, 11). Attendance by shoreworkers at union meetings was the largest in decades, and the negotiating committee received the strongest membership support in its history. Cannery, net, reduction and watchmen classifications voted 90.5% in favour of strike action, while the fresh fish and cold storage sector voted 92.6% in

favour. The change in negotiations that year among the fishers, tendermen, and shoreworker sectors was noted. "In the 28-year history of the UFAWU, shoreworkers have been on strike a total of five weeks. Even when they have struck - as in 1959 and 1963 - their actions have been closely linked to tieups of salmon net fishermen" (1973: June 22, 8). This time they were striking for their own demands. The industrial strike that resulted lasted one week (July 6-15). While fishers capitulated as time went on, shoreworkers and tendermen became more adamant.

A breakthrough occurred with this strike, but inequalities were not erased. An hourly differential of 71 cents between filleters and male labour rates was narrowed to 21 cents. References to male and female networkers was abolished, and, as of April 15, 1974, rates were standardised. In cannery classifications, the hourly base rate differential of 44 cents between men and women was eliminated over a three-year period. The new wage structure elevated B.C. shoreworkers to among the highest paid workers in a primary food industry in the country, but sex differences in pay rates were only narrowed, not eliminated.

Conclusion

Salmon canners originally created a cheap wage labour force among groups partially situated in pre-capitalist relations of production. Until the period of the second world war, employers dictated conditions to plant workers. However, militancy among fishers resulted in the creation of an industrial trade union. Union organisation among

shoreworkers was made possible by corresponding state legislation that ended the contract system as a method of paying labourers through third parties. However, organisation in a trade union did not mean shoreworkers immediately participated as equals. Until the 1973 strike, fishers dominated within the union, although shoreworkers began to slowly articulate their own concerns and interests over the decades. The democratic structure of the union encouraged the development of leaders from among shoreworkers, but, to realise their own interests in a union consisting of fishers with a long history of militancy required that the membership, and not only the leaders, become militant in pressing for its demands. This chapter has outlined the history of that process. In the 1970s, the shoreworker sector emerged as a cohesive and militant group. Developments in the industry served to unite shoreworkers, while they divided fishers over a number of issues. Shoreworkers emerged as a strong body within the union.

In 1977, Homer Stevens stepped down from the presidency, and Jack Nichol, a former shoreworker and shoreworker organiser since the mid-1960s, was elected president of the union by acclamation, a post he holds to the present (1986). While Nichol, and Gordon before him, had continuously pointed to the higher wages received by organised American fish plant workers, in the 1970s provincial shoreworkers emerged as the highest paid fish workers in the world. For example, in 1983, women classified as "Egg Pullers, Packers, Sorters, and Slimers" received \$6.46 per hour in plants located in Bellingham and Puget Sound in Washington (I.L.W.U. contract). The lowest rate, except for

probationary employees, received by UFAWU members in 1982 was \$11.18 per hour, almost double the rates received across the border.

While hourly rates are relatively high compared to other similar industries, especially in comparison to Atlantic fish workers, seasonal employment results in low annual wages. Guppy (1986) provides empirical data on wages, numbers employed and conditions of employment (like number of weeks per season) for provincial shoreworkers (for the period 1975 to 1983). In Table 9.7, for example, he notes annual fish plant earnings for native women in 1983 were \$9,000, while European men earned \$20,000. Thus, conditions of inequality persist. However, plant labour forces have become increasingly militant and have realised significant gains as a result. This has not meant that the structure of the industry as established by salmon canners in the nineteenth century has been eradicated, but significant changes undertaken by organised plant workers have been made. Struggles between employers and shoreworkers, now organised, continue.

¹ The material in this chapter is taken from three previously published papers by the author: "Class Formation and Class Consciousness," op. cit., "The Organization of Women and Ethnic Minorities in a Resource Industry: A Case Study of the Unionization of Shoreworkers in the B.C. Fishing Industry 1937-1949, in Journal of Canadian Studies, 1984: 19(1), 89-107; and "Shoreworkers and UFAWU Organization: Struggles between Fishers and Plant Workers within the Union," in Uncommon Property, op.cit.

² In comparison, the wages of Chinese men in 1897 were estimated to be 14.8 cents per hour, or \$1.48 for a ten-hour day (DMF, 1902: 164).

³ In February, 1942, an estimated 175 employees in 11 reduction plants were organised (1942: Feb. 3, 4).

⁴ This figure was calculated on the basis of 300 monthly men receiving seven months employment and 12% overtime; 600 hourly paid men for 3-1/2 months and 10% overtime; and 1400 women for 2-1/2 months and 10% overtime. The 300 monthly men were the militant sector but, according to these figures, represented only 13% of the labour force.

⁵ Piece rates were only abolished in the 1960s, when the adoption of quarter-pound filling machines rendered the hand filling of cans obsolete.

⁶ For example, the installation of high-speed machines in one cannery led to a reduction in the crew from 60 to 48 workers, while the same volume of fish was processed in less time (The Fisherman, 1954: April 20, 1 and July 13, 6).

⁷ Throughout its history, in almost every round of bargaining, the UFAWU and the Fisheries Association were unable to come to terms, and had to apply for conciliation boards to resolve the disputes. The Fisheries Association set the pattern of agreements among the companies, although a number of "independents" bargain on an individual basis with the union.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

The theoretical argument developed in this thesis is basically a critique of Marx's labour theory of value. The basic problems with that theory are, first, the conceptualisation of a pure capitalist mode of production, and, second, the identification of the "free labourer" as associated with the working class male, himself a historical product of western European history and its evolution from feudalism to capitalism.

In analysing the mechanisms operating within a pure capitalist mode of production, Marx identified the key structural components and problems of a capitalist system. Many of his predictions about the evolution of such a system have been proven correct. The problem lies when one tries to apply his concept of the "free labourer" to the historical emergence of various proletariats. Also problematic, then, is the organisation of wage labourers who do not fit this model. To date, a pure capitalist mode of production has not emerged anywhere in the world. This means that other relations of production, situated in previous modes of production, have influenced, and continue to influence, capitalist development. This also means that the emergence of the "free" labourer is circumscribed by the extent to which labourers

continue to meet survival needs outside capitalist relations of production.

It has been suggested, in the first two chapters, that the western European wage labourer was himself supported in this fashion, through the unpaid work of his wife and children in the nuclear family household. Much research has been undertaken to examine the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. The direction offered in the present study is a re-examination of the labour theory of value to incorporate feudal relations of gender inequality within the development of a proletariat. Hopefully, studies using such a perspective could then identify two separate but interrelated paths to the proletarian condition, based on gender inequality structured into the institutions of feudal society, and incorporated within capitalism. The point of such a reorientation would be to cease regarding women, and other groups, as peripheral to capitalism because their economic participation in capitalist production differs from that of the organised male working class.

One of the immediate criticisms that may be levied against such an argument is that it is functionalist; that is, it analyses capitalism as a system incorporating other pre-capitalist relations of production to minimise production costs and maximise benefits, especially realisation of surplus and profit. The response to such an argument is that capitalism is pursued by a specific class of people who, indeed, will use the conditions of production they find to organise capitalist production. They exercise considerable power. Turning to the case study used here to demonstrate the argument, European colonial power

paved the way for industrial capitalists. The defeat of Chinese and Japanese navies, and the imposition of colonial rule in North America, began a process whereby existing modes of production began to change in specific directions.

Such change was not totally controlled by capitalist entrepreneurs. Peoples situated in Chinese, Japanese, and native economies struggled against capitalist and imperialist encroachments in various ways. Unfortunately, there was not enough evidence to hand to indicate the directions of such struggles. Instead, the evidence used showed how salmon canners benefitted from the economic transformations, and this may lend a deterministic tone to the argument that is not intended.

Capitalist entrepreneurs also struggled against class fractions arising from capitalist development. Some evidence has been presented here to show that mercantilists, merchants trading out of Victoria, and salmon canners did not share the same interests. Salmon canners won in the end. However, they were not as successful in their relations with the provincial state, which consistently legislated against immigration of the type of labour forces salmon canners desired. Again, because the evidence is used solely within the context of one industry, such struggles are only briefly sketched.

The case study was used to demonstrate the creation of a cheap labour force as a process quite separate from the use by capitalists of skilled European male labour. And it is argued that, until the period of the second world war, salmon canners were fairly successful in utilising labour at costs below those necessary for the production and reproduction of labour power within a pure capitalist mode of

production. That is not to say that these labour forces did not struggle against their employers. Indeed, evidence was presented in Chapter 4 showing native labourers, because they were only partially subordinated, were not an ideal labour force. Similarly, when Chinese labour became both skilled and scarce, Chinese men began to ask for higher wages. In this case, canners responded by mechanising the most skilled jobs. A quote from Marx was used where he argues there is little incentive to mechanise when labour power is extremely cheap. And it is precisely when labourers begin to struggle over their wages and conditions of employment that their labour power potentially increases in terms of costs to industrial capitalists.

However, until the second world war, struggle by shoreworkers was sporadic. The groups represented were organising primarily around political issues with the provincial and federal states; for example, over the franchise. In the provincial fishing industry, European males were primarily engaged in fishing, as dependent commodity producers, and a few worked as skilled craftsmen in shore plants. Working class organisation, in the form of a trade union, oddly enough, came from the non-wage sector. And the history of trade union struggle provides evidence of how cheap labourers within the union came to develop a consciousness of themselves as workers. Again, this is not to say that this was the only form of consciousness, since political struggle continued. And many shoreworkers, from evidence gathered in talking to them, don't see themselves in this light, being highly critical of the union (the UFAWU). But a majority began to articulate demands that resulted in shoreworkers assuming a dominant position within the union.

Here again, other factors must be considered, especially charges of fishers forming a combine and conflicts among fishers leading to divisiveness.

Both the provincial and federal states have played important roles in the provincial fisheries. After the second world war, the state intervened directly in labour relations and wage negotiations. Over time, pre-capitalist relations of production have changed and, in the case of the native economies, become ever more dependent on the capitalist market. But employers do not then re-structure wages to enable labourers to realise costs of production and reproduction. Rather, the state is called upon, by both the capitalist and working classes, to meet part of these costs. As canners closed outlying plants, native villages were left without a major source of income, and many native peoples virtually became wards of the state. Within the industry, many of the benefits, especially unemployment insurance for seasonal workers, are partially financed, and wholly administered, by the state. The state has played a direct role in this instance through negotiations with employers and the UFAWU in calculating insurable weeks of employment. Employers have often been asked to stretch processing over a period of time to give workers enough weeks to enable them to apply for unemployment insurance. This is made possible with refrigeration technology; for example, portions of herring are thawed for pulling eggs, to cover a specific number of days and weeks.

That labourers, even cheap labourers, do organise and struggle is evident in Chapter 7, primarily because, with the creation of the UFAWU, such struggle began to take place directly within the industry, rather

than outside it, for example, with Chinese contractors (where evidence is very scarce). And the union recorded the struggle in its biweekly paper, The Fisherman. The account there may be judged to be biased, since it presents only the point of view of union organisers. The events, however, reflect reality, since they can be corroborated with other sources. And the perspective, hopefully, balances earlier evidence. Earlier historical records primarily reflected the points of view of canners and state officials; for example, evidence from the royal commissions and reports of fisheries officers and Indian agents. Putting the two together, even though they represent two perspectives from two different points in time, does allow a reconstruction of the history of the industry, especially of the creation and organisation of cheap labour. However, because such a long period of history is covered so briefly, more detailed historical work is needed to verify events. Lack of detailed information has resulted in some generalisations being made, and these need to be corroborated.

A body of theoretical work relevant to the current discussion is the mode of production debate. It would have been possible to orient the present study within that literature, and this is certainly an area for future research. The literature is so highly complex and abstract that it was felt to orient this thesis around the issue would have resulted in a theoretical dissertation, rather than one making use of a specific case study. Certainly, many of the findings within that literature have direct application to the findings here, especially the links between pre-capitalist and capitalist relations of production. The terminology used here has been fairly simplistic and has not taken

advantage of the precise definitions and problems identified in that body of work.

A particularly interesting problem for future research lies in comparing the effects of gender as opposed to racial/ethnic inequality, and the relations between the two (for example, the double exploitation suffered by women of colour). Again, much research is being done in this area and could be used to develop the theoretical implications of the argument presented here.

Finally, because the evidence marshalled in support of the thesis comes from a specific industry, the question must be asked to what extent the argument holds for other industries. It would be especially interesting to study an industry which has traditionally used European craftsmen but has recently undergone technological change resulting in a deskilling of the labour force. A study that comes immediately to mind is Clement's (1981) on hardrock mining. It would be interesting to see the effects of deskilling on the labour force itself (what happens to skilled craftsmen when their crafts are rendered obsolete) and on how labour is replaced (do labourers associated with cheap wages take the place of these men). Another interesting direction for future study is the current process of so-called de-industrialisation, whereby jobs traditionally performed by skilled and organised European and North American labour forces are exported to be performed by cheap labour in underdeveloped countries. Again, there is a growing body of literature on this subject, and comparisons could be made.

In conclusion, although the work presented here focusses on one industry and its historical evolution, there are a number of ways in

which it has direct application to other theoretical work, and to other industrial developments, especially the use of people situated in underdeveloped economies as cheap labourers in capitalist industries. And if the argument of two distinct but related labour forces is accepted, then it has immediate implications for class formation, organisation and consciousness. Labourers who continue to subsist partially outside capitalist relations of production develop a world view which incorporates different, antagonistic, economic realities. Ideologically this can be used as a weapon by ruling classes to keep these groups passive and subservient. But, it is here suggested, alternatively, there is potential here to organise groups around both specifically proletarian issues as well as issues situated outside the proletarian condition. Many Marxian scholars bemoan the lack of organisation and consciousness among large segments of North American populations. Perhaps part of the reason for the lack of such organisation is that efforts to date have only concentrated on one small sector of the population, that permanently engaged in wage labour. As more and more labourers become displaced through technological development, even those who have until recently experienced stable conditions of employment (the primary sector) become a "reserve." It is important to identify points of struggle both within industrial production as well as outside it. The real challenge then becomes to identify common issues, issues pertinent to groups variously situated around relations of production; for example, unemployed youth, housewives, deskilled craftsmen, native peoples on reserves.

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