

THE 1900 STRIKE OF FRASER RIVER SOCKEYE SALMON FISHERMEN

by

HARRY KEITH RALSTON

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1942

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department
of
History

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April, 1965

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Department of History

The University of British Columbia,
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date April, 1965

ABSTRACT

This study sees the 1900 strike on the Fraser River as providing the setting in which trade unions began in the fisheries of British Columbia, and analyzes both the strike itself and its background from that point of view.

In the two decades to 1890, the Fraser River salmon canning industry grew relatively slowly, limited by the problems of developing techniques for processing, finding labor for packing, and accumulating capital from profits. In the 10 years to 1900, these difficulties had been mostly overcome, and fresh capital, attracted by sizeable profits, nearly tripled the number of canneries. This boom ended in a crisis of over-expansion, marked by strikes and company mergers.

One unforeseen effect of license limitation in the seasons 1889-1891 was a change from paying fishermen a daily wage to paying them at so much per fish, and consequently the start of a series of disputes between canners and fishermen over fish prices. Though in general prices rose throughout the 1890's, the individual fishermen failed to benefit, partly because of price cuts and limits on deliveries during periods of a heavy supply of fish, and partly because of the increasing number of fishermen licensed in each succeeding year.

In an attempt to increase their bargaining strength, white resident fishermen campaigned for changes in federal fishery regulations to restrict competition from Japanese and American fishermen, and to reduce the number of cannery licenses. The first fishermen's

organization, formed in 1893 to further this end, did not survive its unrelated involvement in a strike that year against price cuts. The amendments to the fishery regulations in 1894 and, to an even greater degree, in 1898 reflected the success of this group in gaining their ends by political means. To try to redress the balance, the canners created in 1898 their own closely-knit organization, the British Columbia Salmon Packers' Association.

The difficulties of the seasons of 1898 and 1899, basically caused by over-expansion, led the canners to tighten their organization further by creating in January, 1900, the Fraser River Canners' Association, a cannery combine with power to set maximum fish prices and production quotas for each cannery, and to levy fines on violators of its decisions. About the same time, and partly in reaction to the canners' move, separate unions of fishermen were organized, first at New Westminster, then at Vancouver. The Vancouver union tried and failed to enroll Japanese fishermen who formed in June, 1900, the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society.

The Canners' Association refused to negotiate prices with fishermen's union representatives or to set a minimum price for sockeye. When the sockeye season opened July 1 the fishermen struck, demanding 25 cents a fish through the season. By July 10, the strike included all fishermen on the river--white, Japanese and Indian. After another week, the Canners' Association felt forced to negotiate and in a series of meetings the two sides came close to settlement. At this point, however, the canners broke off negotiations and made a

separate agreement with the Japanese for 20 cents for the first 600 fish in a week and 15 cents thereafter. The canners then provoked an "incident" as an excuse for three friendly justices of the peace to call out the militia to Steveston.

In spite of the Japanese defection and the presence of the militia, the remaining strikers held out for another week. Mediation by E. P. Bremner, Dominion Labor Commissioner, and Francis Carter-Cotton, publisher of the Vancouver News-Advertiser, secured them a negotiated settlement which, though not including any union recognition, guaranteed 19 cents throughout the season.

This success led to the creation in January, 1901, of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia Fishermen's Unions, the first coast-wide fishermen's organization in British Columbia. The strike marked the beginning of continuous union activity in the industry and the start of a tradition of radical leadership that persists to the present day.

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PREFACE

The topic of the present study first became of interest to me when, during the observance of the British Columbia centenary in 1958, The Fisherman, weekly newspaper of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, asked me to contribute an article on some aspect of the early history of fishermen's unions in British Columbia. The Fraser River salmon fishermen's strike of 1900 was an obvious choice of subject, both because of the dramatic events of the strike and because it marked the effective beginning of unions in the fishing industry of British Columbia.

As part of the research on the topic, I consulted the pioneering articles on the history of unions in the fishing industry by Stuart Jamieson and Percy Gladstone, and found myself particularly¹ interested in their interpretation of the outcome of the 1900 strike. Their view is that the strike ended when white and Indian strikers "capitulated" after the Japanese went back to fishing under protection² of the militia. A careful collation of contemporary newspaper

¹ Stuart Jamieson and Percy Gladstone collaborated in two articles published as "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science (hereafter cited as CJEPS), vol. 16 (February 1950), pp. 1-11; and vol. 16 (May 1950), pp. 146-171. Gladstone wrote a further article "Native Indians and the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," CJEPS, vol. 19 (February 1953), pp. 20-34.

² Percy Gladstone and Stuart Jamieson, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," CJEPS, vol. 16 (May 1950), p. 156.

accounts, which reported the strike in great detail, seemed to me to offer evidence for a different interpretation of the results of the strike, and this evidence I presented in the article in

³
The Fisherman.

Subsequently, Mr. Gladstone allowed me to read the first
⁴
draft of his M.A. thesis, which presented in more detail the historical evidence on which his articles written in collaboration with Dr. Jamieson had been based. This evidence failed to alter my impression that what Gladstone and Jamieson considered a major defeat could not really have been so, since on the very heels of the strike came the creation of the first coast-wide fishermen's union, the Grand Lodge of British Columbia Fishermen's Unions, whose organization began in September, 1900. It was also apparent to me that the wide scope of Gladstone's subject had compelled him to limit the depth of treatment of any single part of it, and that, therefore, a re-examination of at least a portion of the period would be profitable.

In returning to this topic in the present study, I have tried, before proceeding to an analysis of the strike itself, to put the strike of 1900 in its historical setting. This has involved an outline of the development of relevant features in the growth of

3 "Real Story of the 1900 Fraser Strike," The Fisherman [Vancouver], March 14, 1958, pp. 9, 11.

4 Percy Gladstone, "Industrial Disputes in the Commercial Fisheries of British Columbia," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1959.

the canning industry; and a detailed examination of labor relations in the industry in the decade following 1889, the year license limitation began on the Fraser River. Events leading to the earlier strike of 1893 have been re-examined in light of positive evidence on the effects of license limitation, and changes in fish prices and fishery regulations in the years from 1893 to 1899 have been traced. Only after what seems to me this essential clearing of the ground, have I attempted to analyze the causes, the events and the results of the 1900 strike.

The present study, by examining in detail the beginnings of trade unions in one of the chief resource industries of British Columbia at a period when canned salmon was a principal export staple of the provincial economy, also attempts to make a contribution to the analysis of the growth of the labor and socialist movement in the province. The formative years of the radical movement in British Columbia lie within the period of the foundation of the province's economy from 1871 to 1914, and more especially within the two decades from 1890 to 1910. The roots of the radical tradition must, therefore, be sought in this period, and I am convinced that, before any generalizations can be made with authority, detailed studies must be undertaken of the environment in which militant labor and socialist leaders rose to prominence in the basic industries. Fishermen's unions have a history of left-wing leadership which persists to the present day, and the present study seeks to explain the specific context in which that leadership began.

Committed as I am to this approach, I believe that generalizations about the relative strength of the labor and socialist movement in British Columbia before World War I are, in the present state of research, of very limited value. An example of such an effort at generalization is set forth in an essay by Paul Fox.⁵ Fox sees as the major factor in the growth in this period of radicalism in British Columbia the existence of relatively large-scale industries, like coal and metal mining and lumbering, with their large pools of semi-skilled and transient labor, which had to compete with Orientals, in an area also receiving large numbers of British and American immigrants. Other factors, he thinks, were the lack of the stabilizing effects of large-scale agriculture and the vulnerability of British Columbia to American radical ideas.⁶

As Fox acknowledges, this explanation is not original:⁷ his specific points are paraphrased from a study by Ronald Grantham. Grantham, however, offers none of the detailed documentation which,⁸ in my view, is fundamental to such an analysis. Two other academic

⁵ Paul W. Fox, "Early Socialism in Canada," The Political Process in Canada, ed. J. H. Aitchison, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1963, pp. 79-98.

⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

⁷ Ronald Grantham, "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia, 1898-1933," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1942.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 7-8 (Introduction).

studies in this field, by John T. Saywell and T. R. Loosmore, add nothing in the way of convincing general analysis. Saywell applies what he simply refers to, without elaboration or supporting evidence, as "the frontier hypothesis" to explain the gains of the labor and socialist movements in British Columbia up to 1903.⁹ Loosmore provides detailed and solid documentation, but he makes a point of avoiding general explanations, because he sees his own work as merely complementary to studies of the Socialist movement like those of Grantham and Saywell.¹⁰

A working hypothesis superior to any of these explanations seems to me to be that while unionism does not necessarily lead to socialism, trade unions do provide a fertile seed-bed for socialist ideas. I incline to the view put forward by Stuart Jamieson in his consideration of a possible regional basis for industrial disputes in this province.¹¹ Jamieson offers a series of alternative explanations for the prevalence of strikes in British Columbia in the years before 1914. Some of these explanations parallel the ones offered by

9 John Tupper Saywell, "Labour and Socialism in British Columbia: A survey of Historical Development before 1903," British Columbia Historical Quarterly, vol. 15 (July-October 1951), p. 149.

10 Thomas Robert Loosmore, "The British Columbia Labor Movement and Political Action, 1879-1906," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1954, pp. 220-1, 224.

11 Stuart Jamieson, "Regional Factors in Industrial Conflict: The Case of British Columbia," CJEPS, vol. 28 (August 1962), pp. 405-416.

Grantham, Saywell and Fox: that the frontier produces radical and militant labor movements and political parties, that the conditions creating radical ideologies reflect the wide cleavage of interest and viewpoint between labor and management, and that the theories of class conflict, which are an integral part of these ideologies, provide a rationale for strike action.¹² Another explanation he advances is, however, of a different order. He points out that a survey of dozens of industries in eleven countries has shown that certain industries are strike-prone. The authors of the survey list the industries with a high incidence of strikes as mining, maritime, longshoring, lumber and textiles.¹³ If "maritime" is considered to include fishing, these, with the exception of textiles, are among the chief industries of British Columbia in the years under study.

As Jamieson says, if this line of reasoning is followed, then the usual argument about the place of radical ideologies in industrial conflict in the province must be completely reversed: the ideology will be seen as a product, not a cause, of conflict. But only through a detailed examination industry by industry of industrial conflicts during the period can this promising avenue of approach be explored. The present study, as well as analyzing

12 Stuart Jamieson, "Regional Factors in Industrial Conflict: The Case of British Columbia," CJEPS, vol. 28 (August 1962), p. 410.

13 Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, "The Interindustry Propensity to Strike--an International Comparison," Industrial Conflict, ed. Arthur Kornhausen, Robert Dubin, and Arthur M. Ross, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1954, pp. 189-212, cited in ibid., p. 410.

and documenting the 1900 strike, is also an attempt, as far as the Fraser River salmon canning industry is concerned, to provide a basis for evaluating this hypothesis.

This study could not have been completed without the facilities for research and writing placed at my disposal by Willard E. Ireland, Provincial Librarian and Archivist. My thanks go to him and to members of the staffs of the Provincial Library and the Provincial Archives for their help, especially to Christine Fox and James Mitchell of the Library and to Inez Mitchell, Dr. Dorothy Blakey Smith and Frances Woodward of the Archives. Anne Carson Yandle of the Special Collections Division, University of British Columbia Library, was most generous in making available materials on a long-term basis. I also wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Margaret A. Ormsby of the Department of History, whose editorial suggestions did much to clarify my often turgid presentation, and to my wife who vowed she would never type another thesis, but did.

Finally, I want to thank the family of John Stevens, a pioneer Fraser River fisherman, for making available to me, and later presenting to the Provincial Archives, a fishing license and contract for the season of 1889, which are to my knowledge the only such documents surviving from that period. Their sense of history is, unfortunately, too rare among descendants of the pioneers of the salmon canning industry.

CHAPTER I

THE FRASER RIVER SALMON CANNING INDUSTRY--GROWTH PATTERNS

At the end of the fishing season of 1899, the salmon canning industry of the Fraser River had completed nearly thirty years of operation, during which time the canning of salmon had grown from an experimental novelty to the source of British Columbia's¹ second largest export. When British Columbia entered Confederation, its potentially rich salmon fisheries were practically undeveloped: canning of salmon on a commercial scale had just begun, although salting had been carried on since 1829 when it was undertaken at² Fort Langley by the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1899, on the Fraser³ River alone, 46 canneries packed 486,409 cases of salmon.

Fundamental to the pattern of growth of the Fraser River industry are the characteristics peculiar to the sockeye salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*) of that river system, since the sockeye was, in the period 1870-1900, canned almost to the exclusion of any of the other species of salmon that spawn in its tributary streams and lakes.

1 British Columbia Board of Trade (Victoria), Annual Report, 1900, p. 53.

2 E. O. S. Scholefield and F. W. Howay, British Columbia From the Earliest Times to the Present, Vancouver, S. J. Clarke, 1914, vol. 2 [by F. W. Howay] pp. 584-5.

3 Table I, p. 2 below.

TABLE I

CANNERIES FRASER RIVER

NUMBER OPERATING, TOTAL PACK OF SOCKEYE SALMON BY YEARS 1876-1901^a

Year	Canneries	Pack	Year	Canneries	Pack
1876	3	10,047	1889	16	303,875
1877	5	64,347	1890	17	241,889
1878	8	105,101	1891	21	178,954
1879	7	50,490	1892	16	79,715
1880	7	42,155	1893	26 b	457,797
1881	8	142,516	1894	28 b	363,967
1882	13	199,104	1895	28 b	400,368
1883	13	109,701	1896	34 b	356,984
1884	6	38,437	1897	42 b	860,459
1885	6	89,617	1898	46 c	256,101
1886	11	99,177	1899	46 c	486,409
1887	12	130,088	1900	45 c	170,889 ^c
1888	12	76,616	1901	49 c	974,911

a Annual Reports of the Inspector of Fisheries for British Columbia, Canada, Parliament, Sessional Papers (hereafter cited as Canada, S.P.), for relevant years.

b During these years, either Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company or Victoria Canning Company, or both, lumped together the production of all their Fraser River plants into a single production figure. It is therefore uncertain whether in any given year they operated all of their plants. Some of the plants involved were unquestionably "dummy" canneries which put up no pack of their own, but enabled the owners to get additional fishing licenses. (See Chapter II, p. 43 below). These canneries have been eliminated where they are known not to have packed.

c Total for canneries operating includes for the years 1898, 1899 one cannery located on English Bay, and for the years 1900, 1901 two canneries on English Bay. The pack of these canneries was nearly all Fraser River fish.

The average Fraser River sockeye matures at four years of age. It spends from five to nine months in the gravel of the stream where it is spawned, another year in a lake before migrating to the sea, and two and a half years far out in the Pacific Ocean. When mature, it migrates back to the coast, passes up the river to its home stream again, spawns and dies. Because of the four-year life span, the same spawning ground can, and often does, support four relatively distinct families of sockeye, each with a separate line of descent, called a cycle. The brood year of a generation of sockeye is⁴ called the cycle year.

On the Fraser River, one cycle year out of the four tends to become dominant, that is, the return of spawning fish for that year is many times that of the return of the smallest year. A second cycle year also is larger than the two remaining years and is referred to as sub-dominant. This dominance is naturally established, and long before the canning industry was established, was observed at Hudson's Bay posts on the Fraser and its tributaries. During the period we are concerned with, the dominant year (also and confusingly referred to as the cycle year) was the year after leap years, that is, 1873, 1877, 1881, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1897, 1901. The sub-dominant year followed⁵ the dominant year.

⁴ Philip Gilhousen, Migratory Behaviour of Adult Fraser River Sockeye, 1960, International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission, Progress Report [unnumbered], pp. 2-6.

⁵ F. J. Ward and P. A. Larkin, Cyclic Dominance in Adams River Sockeye Salmon, 1964, International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission, Progress Report no. 11, pp. 4-12.

Each annual return of spawners consists of a number of individual runs or races which pass in succession up the river. Each race has its own separate spawning period and each spawns in a particular stream (for example, the Early Stuart run and the Later Stuart run). Although the differences in the individual runs are not visible to the naked eye, scientists have devised a method of distinguishing between races by examination of the scales of the fish. By this means, it is possible to say that the average race of sockeye takes about a month to pass a given point, but that two-thirds of the fish pass the point in from a week to twelve days.⁶

The conditions, therefore, governing the commercial sockeye fishery on the Fraser River are a short season with sharp peaks of intensive fishing effort and a wide variation between one year and the next in numbers of sockeye returning to spawn.

The pattern of cyclic dominance is not fully reflected in the catch statistics of the early years of the salmon canning industry. Limitations on the pack, in most years of these first two decades, were from causes other than lack of fish. Not until the industry began to attain its full growth in the late 1890's did the phenomenon of the one big catch every four years become pronounced.⁷

The growth of the industry on the Fraser River is marked by two phases: the period from the beginning to 1890, marked by more or

⁶ Gilhousen, Migratory Behaviour of Adult Fraser River Sockeye, p. 4.

⁷ See Table I, p.2 above.

less steady increases, as the industry refined its techniques and consolidated its organization, and the period from 1890 to the turn of the century, a boom that culminated in a series of strikes and company mergers.

Limitations on the growth of the industry in the decades 1870-1890 were of several kinds. The technology was primitive; slow and inefficient hand methods were used in most phases of the processing. Workers were scarce and the canneries had to compete with mining "rushes" and railway construction. Many entrants into the industry did not have enough capital; they could not survive the ups and downs created by fluctuations in the sockeye run and changes in market conditions.

Hand processes were generally recognized to be the "bottle
8
neck" in the industry. One of the chief limits on the packing process was the necessity of making the tinplate containers by a series of operations that involved a large amount of hand labor. In the earliest canneries, each can had to be cut by hand out of sheet tinplate, formed and soldered. By 1890, a series of machines had been developed to punch out body-pieces and tops and bottoms, as well as to apply the solder. But these machines were still basically aids to the
9
hand process, rather than an automatic manufacturing device. An

8 H. E. Gregory and Kathleen Barnes, North Pacific Fisheries, New York, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1939, p. 90, n. 2.

9 J. N. Cobb, Pacific Salmon Fisheries, 4th ed., 1930, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Fisheries, Fisheries Document No. 1092, pp. 516-7.

automatic can-making machine was not introduced to British Columbia
until 1896.¹⁰ Even then many canners still believed that making their
own cans was no more expensive, besides giving a longer season's work
to the Chinese crew they needed for packing.¹¹ Can-making involved
a nice calculation of the season's prospects. A typical cannery, one
which in that period packed up to 13,000 cases, had to allow two
months for its crew to make the 650,000 to 700,000 cans required.¹²
Since cans were liable to rust, it was not considered advisable to
have too many on hand at the season's end. On the other hand, if
the pack were larger than expected the cannery could be out of cans
with fish still running and with no means of quickly replenishing
its stock.¹³

A second limiting factor, this one in the canning process
itself, was the need to butcher the fish and fill the cans by hand.

10 J. C. Lawrence, "An Historical Account of the Early Salmon
Canning Industry in British Columbia 1870-1900," unpublished
graduating essay, University of British Columbia, 1951, p. 32, n. 78.

11 Canada, Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration,
"Report and Minutes of Evidence," 1902, Canada, S.P., 1902, no. 54a,
p. 135.

12 Alfred Carmichael, "Account of a Season's Work at a Salmon
Cannery [;] Windsor Cannery, Aberdeen, Skeena," Provincial Archives
of British Columbia manuscript, p. 1. Pack figures for 1887-1890,
Canada, S.P., 1891, no. 8a, p. 179.

13 This situation was somewhat relieved in the 1890's by the trans-
fer of unused cans between canneries of the same company on the Fraser
and northern rivers (Victoria Colonist [hereafter cited as Colonist] ,
Aug. 10, 1893, p. 2; Aug. 11, p. 5).

Once the fish landed on the cannery floor, a dressing crew of from 15 to 20 men was needed to cut off heads, tails and fins and to remove the entrails.¹⁴ An exceptionally fast worker was reported to be able to perform this operation at the rate of 2,000 fish in a 10-hour shift.¹⁵ The speed of workers filling the cans was estimated at a dozen cans every four minutes,¹⁶ or from 1,200 to 1,400 cans per shift.¹⁷

Estimates of productivity are difficult to arrive at. One authority estimates that, prior to the introduction of high-speed machines,¹⁸ it took a crew of 300 to process 3,000 cases a day. While these figures are not exclusively based on British Columbia production, all the canneries on the Pacific Coast from Puget Sound to Alaska used the same techniques. Fragmentary material from British Columbia for the year 1883 indicates productivity in the same range or slightly lower; that is, 100 to 150 workers were required to process 1,000 cases a day.¹⁹ At this time it was not possible to increase production by speeding up the canning "lines." This could only be done by adding more lines and increasing the crew in proportion. The

14 Cobb, Pacific Salmon Fisheries, p. 519.

15 Colonist, July 26, 1881, p. 3.

16 Carmichael, "Season's Work at Windsor Cannery," p. 7.

17 "Our Salmon and Salmon Canneries," The Resources of British Columbia, vol. 1 (December 1883), p. 42.

18 Gregory and Barnes, North Pacific Fisheries, p. 112.

19 See Table II, p. 8 below.

TABLE II

B. C. CANNERIES 1883^a

SEASON'S PACK, DAILY CAPACITY, CANNERY CREW, FISHING BOATS, FISHERMEN

[Figures in square brackets computed from data as given]

	Pack 1883	Capacity per day cases	(1) Cannery Crew	Fishing Boats	(2) b Fishermen	(3) Others	(1+2+3) Total
<u>Fraser River</u>							
Coquitlam [Port Mann]	10,500 ^c	1,000	[55-130]	30	[120]	-	175-250
Delta [Ladner's Landing]	11,735 ^c	[1,000?]	150	40	160	20	330
Ewen & Co. [New Westminster]	10,500 ^c	1,000	[140-160]	35-40	[140-160]	-	300
Richmond [On Richmond Is.- North Arm below Marpole]	8,900 ^c	600	-	-	-	-	-
Wadham's [Ladner's Landing]	11,600 ^c	1,000	-	-	-	-	245
<u>Northern</u> Rivers Inlet [mouth of Owikeno River]	10,780 ^c	1,000	120	40	160	[20]	300

a "Our Salmon and Salmon Canneries," The Resources of British Columbia, vol. 1 (December 1883), pp. 42-44. This table brings together evidence on productivity per cannery worker and on shift work by fishermen. Although the data is fragmentary, it is still the most complete found for this early period.

b Two men to a boat, two shifts per day.

c Pack figures for Delta and Rivers Inlet canneries are taken from Canada, S.P., 1889, no. 8, p. 235, which also records the pack of the other canneries listed but with minor variations from figures in the table above: Coquitlam - 9,630 cases; Ewen & Co. - 10,438 cases; Richmond - 9,200 cases; Wadham's - 11,856 cases.

"Iron Chink" and the automatic can-filler, which permitted a speed-up of the processing and at the same time a reduced crew (75 for 3,000 cases a day),²⁰ did not come into use until after the period under consideration.

Efforts by the canners to expand their production were bound, therefore, to create an increasing demand for seasonal labor. This demand could not easily be supplied from the small population of British Columbia during this period: 36,247 in 1871, 49,459 in 1881 and 98,173 in 1891.²¹ Especially was this true in the earlier part of the three decades under study for in 1871 there were only 9,038 whites and negroes and 1,548 Chinese in the new province. The bulk of the population was native Indian, estimates of whose numbers range from 25,661 to 40,000. Even allowing for a wide margin of error in enumeration, the Indians were the largest single labor force in 1871. In 1881 they still made up about half the population, and in 1891, one-third. Their predominance in the population made them a potential source of labor for the infant salmon canning industry. Another group who could similarly be expected to provide labor were the Chinese. Their numbers in 1871 were given as 1,548, in 1881 as 4,350 and in 1891 as 8,910. On the other hand, there were not many white laborers available in the 30-year period, and most especially in the 1870's and 1880's. Most white laborers were

20 Gregory and Barnes, North Pacific Fisheries, p. 112.

21 See Table III, p. 10 below.

TABLE III

POPULATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 ^a

Year	Native Indians	Chinese	Japanese	All Others Including Whites	Total
	^b	^b		^b	^b
1871	25,661	1,548	-	9,038	36,247
1881	^c 25,661	^c 4,350	-	[19,448]	^c 49,459
1891	^d 35,202	^e 8,910	-	[54,061]	^f 98,173
1901	^g 25,488	^g 14,576	^g 4,515	[134,078]	^g 178,657

a Figures in square brackets are computed from data as given.

b Census of Canada, 1891, vol. 1, p. 366; British Columbia Blue Book, 1870, cited in Langevin, H. L. "Report on British Columbia," Canada, S.P., 1872, no. 10, pp. 22-3 gives white 8,576, negro 462, Chinese 1,548 - total 10,586. Indians estimated as 35,000-40,000.

c Census of Canada, 1881, vol. 1, pp. 298-9 (Table III - Origins of the People); Canada, Department of Indian Affairs, "Annual Report," 1881, Canada, S.P., 1882, no. 6, pp. 221-3, gives Indian total as 35,052 (partly estimated).

d Canada, Department of Indian Affairs, "Annual Report," 1891, Canada, S.P., 1892, no. 14, part 1, p. 253, total 35,202 (partly estimated).

e Census of Canada, 1891, vol. 8, p. 332 (Table II - Places of Birth).

f Ibid., 1891, vol. 1, p. 366 (Table VI - Population of 1871, 1881, 1891 compared by Electoral Districts).

g Ibid., 1901, vol. 1, pp. 2, 5, 416; Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, "Report," 1902; Canada, S.P., 1902, no. 54, p. 8, gives the figures as Chinese 14,376, Japanese 4,578, Whites and Indians 157,815; Census of Canada, 1931, vol. 1, pp. 731-2 (Table 35 - Racial Origins of the population, rural and urban, Canada and provinces, 1871, 1881, 1901 - 1931) gives figures as Indian 28,949, Chinese 14,985, Japanese 4,597; Canada, Department of Indian Affairs, "Annual Report," 1901, Canada, S.P., 1902, no. 27, part 2, p. 180, estimates the Indian total as 24,576.

laborers from necessity. They waited only for news of a fresh "strike"²² to leave their jobs and join the rush to the new diggings.

A shortage of labor plagued the canneries throughout their early years. This shortage was mostly in the canning process--with a limited number of canneries and a relative abundance of fish, a very few fishermen were easily able to keep the slow-moving cannery lines busy. Their effectiveness was increased by the practice of²³ working two 12-hour shifts of two men per boat. The labor shortage was in relatively skilled cannery processes of can-making, butchering, filling, testing and labelling.

The canneries did draw on the largest labor pool in the province--the native Indians. With their skill as boatmen and their age-old traditions as salmon fishermen, the Indians were quick to adapt to the gillnet skiffs used in the commercial fishery. In the earliest years they provided the bulk--if not all--of the actual²⁴ fishermen. The transition to the factory-type work involved in

22 Canada, House of Commons, Select Committee on Chinese Labor and Immigration, "Report," Journals, 1879, app. 4, p. 38 (testimony of F. J. Barnard).

23 "Our Salmon and Salmon Canneries," The Resources of British Columbia, vol. 1 (December 1883), pp. 42, 43.

24 Henry Doyle asserted that before 1882 practically all the fishermen were Indians (George A. Rounsefell and George B. Kelez, The Salmon and Salmon Fisheries of Swiftsure Bank, Puget Sound and the Fraser River, 1938, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Fisheries, Bulletin No. 27, p. 705). Henry Doyle (1874-1961) was a life-long participant in and a student of the Pacific Coast salmon fisheries. He must have given this information directly to Rounsefell and Kelez, since his help "for valuable information and statistics of early fishing on the Fraser River" is acknowledged (p. 701) and the assertion does not

cannery processing was more difficult for them, which is one reason for the predominance in this phase of the industry of another ethnic group, the Chinese.

Although there appears to have been an attempt by the operators at first to use white labor,²⁵ the Chinese had for most of the 1870's and 1880's, a virtual monopoly of the semi-skilled labor needed in the canning process. Whites were either mechanics or supervisors. The initial entry of the Chinese into the canneries could have been expected from the size of that ethnic group in a small population--other provincial industries, like gold and coal mining, also depended on Chinese labor. Chinese entry may also have been made easier by their previous experience on the Sacramento and Columbia River industries. Certainly they migrated freely up and²⁶ down the Pacific Coast from one salmon river to another, until the

appear in the only work by Doyle listed in the bibliography. Doyle's work for years of which he did not himself have knowledge often does not check with other sources. In this case, however, Doyle is supported by John Buie, Fishery Guardian on the Fraser River, who reported in 1887 that the gillnet boats were "nearly all manned by natives" still (Canada, S.P., 1888, no. 6, p. 257). On the other hand, A. C. Anderson, Inspector of Fisheries for British Columbia from 1876 to 1884, implies that only a proportion (not stated) of the fishermen were Indians ("Annual Report," 1878, Canada, S.P., 1879, no. 3, app. 1, pp. 293, 297). Cf. "Our Salmon and Salmon Canneries," The Resources of British Columbia, vol. 1 (December 1883), p. 43 which indicates that there were a number of white fishermen.

²⁵ Canada, Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, "Evidence," 1885, Canada, S.P., 1885, no. 54a, p. 56 (evidence of J. S. Helmcken).

²⁶ Canada, House of Commons, Select Committee on Chinese labor and Immigration, "Report," Journals, 1879, app. 4, pp. 16, 31, 44, 54; Colonist, Aug. 2, 1881; p. 2; Aug. 7, p. 3; Aug. 9, p. 3.

operation of United States' Chinese Restriction acts in the early
1880's cut their freedom of movement between the two countries.²⁷

In any case, they soon became an indispensable source of
relatively skilled labor--so much so that the proprietors felt they
could not carry on without them.²⁸ The contract system of hiring
Chinese ensured to the canners a supply of skilled labor. That was
its chief advantage to the owners and its provision of labor at low
rates was only secondary.²⁹

The proportion of Indians to Chinese seems to have risen
during the 1880's, partly as a result of restrictions on the Chinese
at a time when the demands of the canning industry were increasing.
In the late 1870's the Chinese appear to have had an almost complete
monopoly of the canning process, even in the northern canneries which,
because of their distance from the main population centres, were, and
are, more dependent on Indian labor.³⁰ On the Fraser River the

27 Canada, Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, "Report of
Commissioner J. A. Chapleau," Canada, S.P., 1885, no. 54a, p. cvi.

28 Ibid., pp. 85, 97, 113, 114 (evidence of cannery agents and
owners Robert Ward, Thomas E. Ladner, W. B. Adair, D. R. Lord).

29 But see Lawrence, "Salmon Canning Industry," pp. 61-65, where he
argues that the chief reason for the contract system was to obtain
cheap labor. Another attractive feature of the contract, which was
in terms of so many cents per case, appears to be that it readily
related the cost of packing to the selling price per case, a distinct
advantage in the days before highly-developed cost accounting
procedures.

30 "Annual Report of the Inspector of Fisheries for British Columbia,"
1878, Canada, S.P., 1879, no. 3, app. 1, p. 297; "Annual Report of the
Inspector of Fisheries for British Columbia," 1879, Canada, S.P., 1880,
no. 9, app. 1, pp. 283-4.

employment of Indian labor in canning processes is mentioned as a novelty in the season of 1881. It appears to have resulted from Chinese attempts to prevent introduction of a soldering machine, which would cut the hand work in can-making, then being done by the Chinese.³¹ By 1883 canneries along the northern coast are reported as employing Indian men and women in processing.³² But a similar report on the Fraser River canneries mentions Indian women only as net makers and indicates that the men were fishermen.³³ A tabular statement for the season of 1884, covering the whole coast, gives totals as follows:

Whites	273
Indians (men and women)	1,280
Chinamen [sic]	<u>1,157</u>
	2,710

The statement goes on to say that the Indians "fish for and clean salmon and Chinamen make the cans (with the aid of machinery), fill them and solder them up, etc."³⁴ After the head tax of 1885 and the application of other restrictions against Chinese immigrants,³⁵ a prominent canner could argue in 1892 that his cannery

31 Colonist, July 26, 1881, p. 3; July 30, p. 3; Aug. 2, p. 2.

32 "The North-West Coast," The Resources of British Columbia, vol. 1 (June 1883), p. 13.

33 "Our Salmon and Salmon Canneries," The Resources of British Columbia, vol. 1 (December 1883), p. 43.

34 T. Revely, Agent, Department of Marine and Fisheries, Victoria to N. F. Davin, Secretary, Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, Aug. 22, 1884, Canada, S.P., 1885, no. 54a, p. 395.

35 The Chinese Immigration Act, 1885, 48-49 Vic. Chap. 71.

needed its own boats and licenses to attract and hold Indian fishermen with their families, because "there are not so many Chinamen as there were." In addition to the labor regularly provided by women, boys and men who were not fishermen, the fishermen were needed to help³⁶ inside the cannery in case of any rush.

With all the Chinese and Indian help they could get, the canneries were still limited in their pack by a labor shortage in cycle years throughout the 1880's. In 1881, the Inspector of Fisheries for British Columbia reported that the canneries "were not worked up to their full capacity, owing to the deficiency of labor, arising from the increased demand for railway and other purposes."³⁷

The Colonist said, "Never in the history of the province has labor, both white and Chinese, been so difficult to procure as at present."³⁸

The steamer Princess Louise made trips to Tacoma hoping to embark Chinese from the Columbia River canneries where the season was ending,³⁹ but with indifferent success. In the next cycle year, 1885, the

usual labor shortage did not materialize. Because of the large carry-over of canned salmon and the depressed state of the market,⁴⁰ only six canneries operated. But in 1889 the story of labor

shortages was again repeated, with the Inspector of Fisheries

³⁶ Canada, British Columbia Fishery Commission, "Evidence," 1892, Canada, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, p. 117 (evidence of Alexander Ewen).

³⁷ Canada, S.P., 1882, no. 5, supp. 2, p. 202.

³⁸ Aug. 14, 1881, p. 3.

³⁹ Colonist, Aug. 7, 1881, p. 3; Aug. 9, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Canada, S.P., 1886, no. 11 (Fisheries), p. 273.

estimating that an additional 15,000,000 one-pound cans could have⁴¹
been put up if enough labor had been available.

Besides mastering the techniques of a new industry and finding sufficient labor to perform the canning processes, the first canners had the twin problems of finding markets to absorb their product and capital to finance their operations. These problems did not promise to be easy of solution in British Columbia, a region thinly-populated and located at the outermost edge of European expansion. The community, moreover, was suffering from a depression associated with the rapid decline in returns from placer mining and had yet to find a solid base for future growth.

Fortunately for the first canners on the Fraser River, they did not have to pioneer a new product in markets as yet undeveloped, but were able to follow the path blazed by the canning industry of the United States Pacific coast. By the time the Fraser River industry was looking for markets, canned salmon from the Columbia River had already established itself in the English market. The only resistance faced by Fraser River canners, and this was soon overcome, was to gain the same acceptance for the redder, oilier sockeye as for the pinker and drier flesh of the Columbia River chinook. A secondary market existed in Australasia; this one likewise was already partially opened by shipments of salted salmon in barrels from British Columbia and tinned salmon from the United States.

⁴¹ Canada, S.P., 1890, no. 17, p. 247.

The provision of sufficient capital for the expansion of the industry was a much more difficult problem to solve. The industry could grow only by an infusion of outside capital or by generating its own capital from profits. The men who first entered into the canning industry had little capital or their own and were not in the established position that would have enabled them to⁴² borrow large amounts of money. Although Great Britain exported large amounts of capital in the period 1870-1900, the flow to Canada⁴³ had hardly begun in 1870 and was not directed to British Columbia.

This lack of capital is one reason for the continued processing of salt salmon on the Fraser River in the late 1860's, after canning had proven feasible. The salting of salmon, although less profitable than canning, was a less difficult process, and the trade in it was an adjunct to the export of lumber from Burrard Inlet. It seems probable that the barrels and half-barrels were sold to ships'

⁴² Henry Doyle remarked, "I do not know of a single one of these pioneers who could be classed as a man of substance in the financial sense at the time he first engaged in the industry" ("Rise and Decline of the Pacific Salmon Fisheries," University of British Columbia manuscript, vol. 1, p. 22). Cf. Kenneth Buckley on pioneers in the wheat economy of the Canadian prairies: "At the outset investment was largely the expenditure of personal effort and savings upon opportunities recognized by those close at hand. Most of the first arrivals on the frontier were North Americans. Their expenditures embodied knowledge gained from experience in a similar environment. Outside capital was not attracted on a significant scale until the boom was well under way." (Capital Formation in Canada, 1896-1930, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1955, p. 5).

⁴³ A. K. Cairncross, Home and Foreign Investment 1870-1913: Studies in Capital Accumulation, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1953, pp. 2-3.

captains, who in those days customarily traded on their own account. An immediate cash sale for the product, a strong consideration for a packer with small capital, could thereby be procured.

Obtaining entry into the English market, whether for canned or salted salmon, presented difficulties to the man without much capital. In the instance of canned salmon, a cycle of about 18 months elapsed from the time the tinplate was ordered in England until the next season's pack was sold. The need therefore was for long-term financing, which, at that period, was unlikely to come from the banks. In the late 1860's the Bank of British Columbia, for instance, had suffered heavy losses amounting to £80,000--from advances to mer-
45
chants in the colony on goods in transit. There was, however, another source of finance for the canners--the commission merchants. The commercial practice on the Pacific Coast was for commission merchants to make advances in the form of overdrawn accounts on goods in transit. This practice, followed by the Victoria manager

44 The single detailed example of the mechanics of this trade which has been found involves a shipment to Sydney, N.S.W. by James Syme. (See letter from Captain Alex. Barrack to Syme, Sydney, Feb. 21, 1868, New Westminster, British Columbian [hereafter cited as Columbian] May 9, 1868, p. 2). In addition to half-barrels of salt salmon, Barrack had for trade two dozen two-pound tins of salmon. One dozen he gave away "to make them known," the other dozen he sold at 2s. 3d. a tin. The built-in limitations on this method in which the salmon had to be sold at once, were underlined by Barrack, who warned against importing too large a quantity "say not over 200 half-barrels" [which would sell for about \$7.00 a barrel] .

45 Victor Ross, "The Bank of British Columbia," The History of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1920, vol. 1, p. 315.

of the Bank of British Columbia, had caused the Bank's losses. ⁴⁶

From the very start of the canning industry the commission merchants of Victoria (later also of San Francisco) provided the finances; the growth of the industry, in fact, depended on their ability to carry the producer until the pack was sold. ⁴⁷ At a later period,

their advances were secured by chattel mortgages on the pack and cannery. ⁴⁸

The names of two firms of Victoria commission merchants and a partnership of two New Westminster general merchants are identified with the earliest beginnings of Fraser River salmon canning. Lowe, Stahlschmidt and Co. first advertised in 1871 as agents for Alexander Ewen, a Scottish-born fisherman who turned to canning after first building up a business in the export of salt salmon. ⁴⁹ Findlay, Durham and Brodie were by 1873 exporting salmon

⁴⁶ Ross, "The Bank of British Columbia," The History of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, vol. 1, pp. 309-314.

⁴⁷ No direct evidence could be found on this point. Assessments for trade licenses in Victoria for 1866 show none of the firms outside the Hudson's Bay Company with a value of more than \$77,525. It is unlikely in the economic conditions prevailing up to 1871, that they increased their capital (Vancouver Island, Gazette, vol. 3 (February 28, 1866), pp. 3-17).

⁴⁸ Doyle, "Pacific Salmon Fisheries," vol. 1, p. 24; Colonist, July 29, 1894, p. 5. No direct evidence of these chattel mortgages could be found for the earliest days of the industry.

⁴⁹ Victoria Standard, Jan. 16, 1871, p. 2. In 1876, the firm, then Stahlschmidt and Co., became Stahlschmidt and Ward. In 1881, Ward bought out Stahlschmidt, his father-in-law, and the firm emerged as Robert A. Ward and Co. In 1891, it was said of the firm that "they had seen the full career [of the salmon fisheries]" (Victoria Illustrated, Victoria, Ellis & Co., 1891, p. 88).

as the agents for John Sullivan Deas, who had his cannery on Deas
Island.⁵⁰ Henry Holbrook and James Cunningham acquired the cannery
started in 1871 by Captain Edward Stamp. Stamp died after operating
for one season and by 1873 the premises were under the control of
Holbrook and Cunningham.⁵¹

Neither Ewen, a fisherman, nor Deas, a tinsmith, was likely
to have large amounts of capital, and Stamp was basically a promoter;
so it is not surprising that two of the three canneries that survived
the first years should have passed into the hands of merchants. Ewen
provides the exception, perhaps because he continued to run his own
salting enterprise, even after entering into a canning partnership.
This enterprise may have been the source of the capital needed to
buy out his partners, which he had succeeded in doing by 1878.⁵²

50 The relations between Findlay, Durham and Brodie and John Sullivan Deas were obscure even in the minds of contemporaries. Reports of the pack of the Deas Island cannery are often given under the name of Findlay, Durham and Brodie (Canada, S.P., 1874, no. 4, app. 5, p. 205; ibid., 1877, no. 5, Fisheries Appendices, p. 340). But Deas was certainly the cannery owner, until he sold out his interest to Findlay, Durham and Brodie in 1878 (New Westminster Mainland Guardian [hereafter cited as Mainland Guardian], Aug. 21, 1878, p. 2; Aug. 28, p. 2).

51 For Stamp's canning efforts see Mainland Guardian, June 20, 1871, p. 3; H. L. Langevin, "Report on British Columbia," Canada, S.P., 1872, no. 10, p. 15; Colonist, Nov. 2, 1871, p. 3; Jan. 27, 1872, p. 3 [report of his death].

52 Mainland Guardian, Nov. 20, 1875, p. 2; June 8, 1879, p. 2.

These three canneries represent the first efforts. The firms named had all accumulated their capital from dealings in British Columbia. The second stage of the growth of the Fraser River canning industry began in 1877. New canneries were financed by capital from the United States, specifically from California and the Columbia River. These operators did their selling and its attendant financing through the San Francisco firm of William T. Coleman and Co.,⁵³ which was the largest in the business on the Pacific Coast. More local entrants were also attracted into the industry and the number of canneries rose to eight in 1881.

A survey in that year by the Inspector of Fisheries for British Columbia estimated the value of plant for the eight canneries to be \$188,000 and the amount of operating capital needed for the season at \$540,000. Of this total, canneries backed by local capital, rather than United States capital, had a value of \$111,000 in plant and were able to call on \$311,000 for their operating needs. The local capital involved in salmon canning, therefore, amounted to \$422,000. This sum had been accumulated in two ways: by local businesses operating in British Columbia, and in some cases, down the Pacific Coast,⁵⁴ and by the cannery operators themselves out of profits.

The 1880's were years of comparative doldrums for the canneries. After the profitable cycle year of 1881, the number of

53 Doyle, "Pacific Salmon Fisheries," vol. 1, p. 25.

54 Canada, S.P., 1882, supp. 2, p. 223.

canneries rose to 13 in 1882, but the figure dropped to six in 1884⁵⁵ and did not reach and pass the 13 mark again until 1889. Reasons for this slump are varied. The Pacific Coast was booming, and British Columbia was experiencing a labor shortage associated with railway construction. In addition many of the operators could pack only in years of strong market demand. In the middle 80's prices were depressed by large packs of Columbia River salmon that clogged the English market.⁵⁶ Those operators whose backer was William T. Coleman of San Francisco had their canneries tied up in the litigation caused by his double-dealing and suffered losses when he was declared bankrupt.⁵⁷

The change of pace in the industry in the decade of the 1890's was startling. In 1889, 16 canneries operated on the Fraser River; in 1899, 46 plants packed salmon.⁵⁸ This boom brought the industry to the crisis of 1900-1901. The influx of new capital into the industry seems to have been decisive in causing its growth. Both new canneries and new operators marked the pattern of the 1890's and gave the decade some of its feverish character. The ambitions of new operations doomed attempts at limitations which might have produced a more orderly expansion and perhaps have avoided the "bust"

55 See Table I, page 2 above.

56 Canada, S.P., 1885, no. 9 (Fisheries), p. 258.

57 Doyle, "Pacific Salmon Fisheries," vol. 1, pp. 156-180.

58 See Table I, page 2 above.

that followed the "boom." The origins of the new capital in the industry are therefore worth examining.

The first expansion was undertaken by the established operators in the business. In 1889, a new limited company, British Columbia Canning Company, Limited, was incorporated in London, England, by a group in which the principals of Findlay, Durham and Brodie were prominent. Authorized capital was £100,000 in £1 shares; 35,000 preference and 35,000 ordinary shares were offered to the public and were reported to have found ready acceptance. The new company acquired four canneries for £34,000; the plant on Deas Island operated previously by Findlay, Durham and Brodie, and three northern canneries, one each on Rivers Inlet, the Skeena River and the Nass River.⁵⁹

The profitability of this enterprise can be followed in the reports of the directors. After their first season in 1889, the directors reported that they had bought a second property on Rivers Inlet for £6,065.⁶⁰ But in spite of this expense, they were able to report a net profit of nearly £19,000 on operations of the first two seasons.⁶¹ This represents a return of over 50 percent on the original purchase cost of the four canneries. The fact that this rate was not maintained into the third year⁶² did not alter the general impression

59 Colonist, March 24, 1889, p. 4.

60 Ibid., July 22, 1890, p. 8.

61 Ibid., Aug. 14, 1890, p. 2.

62 Ibid., Nov. 6, 1892, p. 8.

that the company was very successful and that its example was one to be emulated.

Another pioneer canner, Alexander Ewen, who in 1889 had the largest cannery on the river, also expanded his operations. By this time, Ewen had other interests, including agricultural land and shares in the New Westminster Southern Railway and the New Westminster Gas company,⁶³ and was apparently able to finance both himself and others in the canning business. In partnership with D. J. Munn in the Bon Accord Fishing Company, he added a plant on Sea Island to the plant already in operation near present-day Port Mann.⁶⁴ A second Ewen cannery was built on Lion Island near Ewen's first one.⁶⁵ Ewen claimed he lost \$16,000 on building this plant, a plant which does seem to have been constructed solely to get fishing licenses at a time when they were limited.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, he joined in a partnership in 1893 to build the Canadian Pacific cannery on Lulu Island.⁶⁷

63 J. B. Kerr, Biographical Dictionary of Well-Known British Columbians, Vancouver, Kerr and Begg, 1890, pp. 163-4.

64 Canada, S.P., 1890, no. 17, p. 249. Bon Accord first packed in 1886 and Sea Island in 1889.

65 Ibid., 1892, no. 11a, p. 168.

66 Canada, British Columbia Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, Canada, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. 116-120 (evidence of A. Ewen); see page 43 below.

67 Canada, S.P., 1894, no. 11*, p. 286; Doyle, "Pacific Salmon Fisheries," vol. 1, pp. 217-8.

These years were good years for the established canners. The Inspector of Fisheries for British Columbia reported that operators told him they had returns of from \$15,000 to \$75,000 over the years⁶⁸ 1887 to 1890. Ewen fixed the return in the industry during the⁶⁹ five to six years ending in 1891 at 10 to 20 percent. The rush to get into the canning business shows that others thought good profits were to be made.

One of the most important entrants into the canning industry was another new English company, incorporated in England in April, 1891 under the name of Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company, Limited. It had an authorized capital of £200,000 in 20,000 shares of £10 each, 10,000 preference and 10,000 ordinary. The moving spirit in the company was Henry Ogle Bell-Irving, who had acquired options on nine canneries which he sold to the new company on its formation for a total of \$330,000. Two of these premises were on⁷⁰ the Skeena River, the rest on the Fraser River. Acquisition of two other plants made the company at that time the largest producer⁷¹ of sockeye salmon in the world.

68 Canada, S.P., 1891, no. 8a, p. 175.

69 Canada, Fishery Commission, "Report," 1892, Canada, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, p. 120.

70 British Columbia, Attorney-General, Companies Office, Company Registration Files (hereafter cited as B.C. Reg. of Cos.), File 35 (Lic.) [office files] .

71 Canada, S.P., 1892, no. 11a, p. 168; "Foundations First," Pacific Fisherman (50th Anniversary Number), vol. 50 (August 1952), p. 15.

Since options on that scale could not be sought or granted without causing a stir in the canning community, the next merger was probably in reaction to the negotiations leading to the formation of Anglo-British Columbia Packing. A group of established cannery-men incorporated themselves in February, 1891 as the Victoria Canning Company of British Columbia, Limited Liability, with an authorized capital of \$500,000. This group included many of the operators who had started in the late 1870's and early 1880's. R. P. Rithet and Company had acted as agent for each of the component canneries, and Rithet was prominent in the new company.⁷²

The only firm outside these mergers and these new companies was J. H. Todd and Son, who had two canneries on the Fraser River. Todds were a well-financed Victoria firm, their canning interests being only part of their business as wholesale merchants.⁷³

At the beginning of the season of 1891, therefore, all the canneries on the Fraser River were included in one or other of the five groups enumerated.⁷⁴ Three of the groups--B. C. Canning Company

72 B.C. Reg. of Cos., File 35 (1890), [microfilm] .

73 When Jacob Hunter Todd died in 1899, he left an estate valued at \$508,506.19. His three-quarter interest in the partnership of J. H. Todd and Son was valued at \$338,330.00, after trusts had been created for his widow and two daughters, partly from assets of the firm. (British Columbia, Attorney-General, Victoria Law Courts Registry, Probate Court File No. 2234).

74 Canada, S.P., 1892, no. 11a, p. 168. There were still a number of individual operators in northern canneries.

Limited, Victoria Canning Company, Limited Liability, and J. H. Todd and Son were based in Victoria, and the fourth, the Ewen group, had ties with that city through their agent, Robert Ward and Company. Only Anglo-British Columbia Packing represented the new centre of Vancouver.

Before the boom in the canning industry could get under way, conflicting views on the permissible limit of fishing licenses, and consequently of the number of fishing boats, on the Fraser River had to be resolved. A many-sided struggle over license limitation raged for over three and a half years, from late 1888 until the middle of 1892, when the attempt to restrict the total of licenses on the river to 500 was abandoned. Proposals for restriction of the number of fishing licenses originated in a genuine fear of "over-fishing" among conservation-minded officials of the Fisheries Department, and among thoughtful spokesmen for the industry itself. A hatchery had been started in 1884⁷⁵ and as a conservation measure the restriction of fishing effort on the river seemed the logical next step.⁷⁶ Catch records were employed in arguments for restriction of fishing and the example of the Columbia River was often cited.

⁷⁵ Canada, S.P., 1885, no. 9, supp. 2, pp. 45-7.

⁷⁶ Thomas Mowat, Inspector of Fisheries for British Columbia from 1886 until his death in 1891, first superintended the hatchery. He was from New Brunswick where he had witnessed the depletion of salmon stocks on the rivers there. He argued at one and the same time that "over-fishing" existed and that the hatchery was increasing the supply. See his reports in this period: 1885 (Canada, S.P., 1886, no. 11, Fisheries, p. 248) - "the falling off in the run is due to over netting in the estuaries and by Indians in the headwaters;" (Canada,

Catches on the Columbia were less in the late 1880's than they had⁷⁷ been, and the pack on the Fraser River had also fallen.⁷⁸ Federal fisheries men in British Columbia favoured limiting licenses.⁷⁹ The

S.P., 1887, no. 16, p. 240) - "the failure . . . they had been over-fished;" "an improvement in the run of Sâwquai; which may be accounted for by the returns from artificial hatching;" 1889 (Canada, S.P., 1890, no. 17, p. 248) - "an exceptional run . . . the success of the Fraser River hatchery;" 1890 (Canada, S.P., 1891, no. 8a, p. 174) - "What, then, is the cause of such a large increase during the past four years. It is, I claim, solely attributable to artificial stocking and better protective regulations."

77 One set of statistics purporting to show the depletion of the Columbia River gives the catch for that stream as follows:

1880	- 530,000	1885	- 554,000
1881	- 550,000	1886	- 448,500
1882	- 541,000	1887	- 354,055
1883	- 629,000	1888	- 379,000
1884	- 620,000		

Canada, S.P., 1889, no. 8, p. 236. These figures do not prove the existence of depletion--the largest pack on the Columbia was still to come--634,696 cases in 1895 (Cobb, Pacific Salmon Fisheries, p. 553). Those citing smaller Columbia catches as evidence of over-fishing ignored the effect of the transfer of efforts to more profitable streams in Alaska, where the pack rose from 6,539 cases in 1880 to 412,115 cases in 1888. They also ignored poor market conditions in the mid-1880's, cited in previous Federal reports, as a cause of decline in Pacific Coast packs (Canada, S.P., 1885, no. 9, p. 259).

78 See Table I, p. 2 above. As with the Columbia, arguments about depletion are not justified in light of the increased packs of subsequent years.

79 1887 (Canada, S.P., 1888, no. 6, pp. 256-7) - Chas. F. Green, Fishery Guardian, Fraser River: "I would suggest . . . in future only a limited number of licenses . . . no cannery be allowed more than 40 boats" John Buie, Fishery Guardian, Fraser River: "Some limit should be placed on the number of nets." 1888 (Canada, S.P., 1889, no. 8, p. 245) - C. H. Green: "I have spoken to several owners . . . they would be satisfied with 30 boats provided they were all to take the same number."

British Columbia Board of Trade (Victoria), which had an active section of cannery and allied interests in its membership, proposed limiting licenses to 40 per cannery with a total of 500 for the⁸⁰ river.

The first machinery for license limitation was contained in a new set of general fishery regulations for the Province of British Columbia promulgated by the federal Department of Fisheries in the⁸¹ fall of 1888. Prior to this time, federal regulation had sat very lightly on the industry. Although the Fisheries Act (31 Vict. Cap. 60) had been extended to British Columbia in 1876, the year that the first federal Inspector of Fisheries was appointed, regu-⁸²lations had not been issued until 1878. They were minimal, and in any case, argument between the leaders of the infant industry and the federal authorities about their effectiveness resulted in their being⁸³ partially suspended. No licensing of any kind was undertaken until

80 British Columbia Board of Trade (Victoria), "Minutes of Council re Regulations of Salmon Fisheries, March 22, 1888," Ninth Annual Report, 1888, pp. 52-53.

81 Canada, Privy Council, "Order in Council, November 26, 1888," [Fishery Regulations for the Province of British Columbia], Canada Gazette, vol. 22 (December 1, 1888), pp. 956-7.

82 Canada, Privy Council, "Order in Council, May 30, 1878," [Salmon Fishery Regulations for the Province of British Columbia], Canada Gazette, vol. 11 (June 1, 1878), p. 1258.

83 William Smith, "Paper on The Fisheries of Canada," Sept. 19, 1893, Canada, S.P., 1894, no. 11*, pp. cx-cxvii. The Annual Report reproduces a number of documents from Fisheries departmental files. They formed part of a paper read at a fishermen's convention held at the Chicago Columbia Exhibition. See also Canada, S.P., 1886, no. 11, Fisheries, p. xi where it is stated that "the fishery laws are only partially extended to British Columbia and Manitoba."

the season of 1882, when it seems to have taken the form of licensing⁸⁴ each cannery. Individual licenses for each fishing boat are first⁸⁵ recorded in the year 1887. The regulations of 1888, however, not only laid down a licensing procedure in considerable detail, but gave the Minister power ". . . from time to time, [to] determine⁸⁶ the number of boats, seines, or nets or other fishing apparatus."

Acting under the power granted in these regulations, the government proposed to limit the total number of licenses on the Fraser River for 1889 to 450. Such an outcry was raised about this and other restrictions in the proposed regulations, both by the canners as a group and by the Board of Trade, that enforcement was partially suspended for the fishery season of 1889 (which happened⁸⁷ to be the big year in the four-year sockeye cycle). The limitation of licenses seems to have proceeded nevertheless, with not more than 500 licenses being issued, 366 to the canneries and upwards of a⁸⁸ hundred to independent fishermen. The plan was to set the year

⁸⁴ Canada, S.P., 1883, no. 7, supp. 2, p. 190.

⁸⁵ Canada, S.P., 1888, no. 6, p. 257. The jump in license revenue from \$943.50 in the year ending June 30, 1887 to \$6,934.35 in the next fiscal year makes it likely that some change in system was effected for the season of 1887 (Canada, S.P., 1888, no. 6, p. x; ibid., 1889, no. 8, p. xix).

⁸⁶ Canada Gazette, vol. 22 (December 1, 1888), p. 957.

⁸⁷ Canada, S.P., 1890, no. 17, p. xii.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. xii, 254; ibid., 1891, no. 8a, pp. 180-1 shows the licenses issued to each cannery in 1889. The total for cannery licenses is at variance, for reasons that are not clear, with the total of 350 which was supposed to be the quota for the canneries (see p. 42 below).

1889 as a standard one and to issue only 500 licenses in each subsequent year.

This form of conservation soon broke down under pressure from the canners, the independent fishermen and the politicians friendly to their interests. On the recommendation of a Royal Commission set up to investigate complaints about British Columbia Fishery regulations the government abandoned the total limit of 500 licenses. Instead, while the number of cannery licenses was limited, an unlimited issue of individual licenses could be granted to "bona fide fishermen, being British subjects."⁸⁹ Cannery licenses were granted on pro rata basis, according to canning capacity, for the season of 1893.⁹⁰ This practice was abandoned in 1894 when new fishery regulations were adopted limiting cannery licenses to 20 per plant.⁹¹ In 1898, the limit was lowered to 10 per cannery,⁹² effective for the season of 1899.

The effect of this battle, which the canners both won and lost, was to produce a shift in the predominant type of relationship between the canner and the fishermen who caught his fish. Prior to

⁸⁹ Canada, British Columbia Fishery Commission, "Report," 1892, Canada, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. xi-xii.

⁹⁰ Rounsefell and Kelez, Fraser River Salmon Fisheries, p. 704.

⁹¹ Canada, Privy Council, "Order in Council, March 3, 1894" [Fishery Regulations for the Province of British Columbia], Canada Gazette, vol. 27 (March 17, 1894), pp. 1579-80.

⁹² Canada, Privy Council, "Order in Council, August 3, 1898" [Amendment to Fishery Regulations for the Province of British Columbia], Canada Gazette, vol. 32 (August 13, 1898), pp. 280-1.

this time, the majority of fishermen had been employees of the canneries. They worked for wages with the company providing a boat and a net. The independent fisherman, owning both his own boat and net, and usually selling to the cannery on a contract, was in a distinct minority on the Fraser River. The limitation of cannery licenses, in the circumstances of an increasing number of canneries and thus of increased competition for fish, produced a rapid rise in the number of licensed fishermen, fishing on contract or shares.

The proportion of licenses held by the canneries, however, dropped⁹³ sharply.

The degree of real independence of these so-called "independent" fishermen varied. In many cases, their stake was only in their license, the company renting them both boat and gear. But whether or not their "independence" was a fiction, their relationship with the cannery operator had changed. The wage system was replaced with a contract and share system based on the price of fish, being calculated in this period on a rate of so many cents per fish. Once this arrangement became dominant, negotiations over the price of fish became significant in the relations between a canner and his fishermen. First each party to the negotiations bargained as an individual. Then bargaining groups were organized by both sides. The changeover from the predominance of the wage relationship to the predominance of the contract relationship took place after the

93 See Table IV, p. 33 below.

TABLE IV

CANNERY SHARE OF TOTAL LICENSES ISSUED

FRASER RIVER 1893, 1897 - 1900

Year	Cannery Licenses	Total
1893	909 ^a	1,174 ^a
1897	821 ^b	2,318 ^c
1898	925 ^b	2,642 ^c
1899	460 ^b	2,722 ^c
1900	450 ^b	3,683 ^c

a 1893 - Rounsefell and Kelez, Fraser River Salmon Fisheries, p. 704.

b Figures for cannery licenses for 1897-1900 are computed from pack records published by the Department of Marine and Fisheries for the following years: 1897 - Canada, S.P., 1899, no. 11a, p. 226; 1898 - Canada, S.P., 1900, no. 11a, p. 202; 1899 - Canada, S.P., 1901, no. 22, p. 159; 1900 - Canada, S.P., 1902, no. 22, p. 175.

c 1897-1900 totals are taken from Rounsefell and Kelez, Fraser River Salmon Fisheries, p. 706 (Table 2).

abandonment of license limitation in 1892. This changeover set the stage for the emergence of organization among the fishermen, and also for the transformation of the canners' association into a group as much concerned with negotiations on fish prices and the orderly disposal of the product, as with lobbying government and presenting the views of the industry to the business community.

In adapting to this changed role, the canners found it difficult to subordinate their conflicting interests as competitors to the requirements of their interests as a group. License limitation provides a case in point. The limitation in 1889 to 500 licenses on the Fraser followed lines proposed by the cannery committee of the British Columbia Board of Trade in Victoria. But this limitation was not in the interests of those, like Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company, newly entered into the business and anxious to expand their undertaking. Apparently the differences within the industry caused the temporary break-up of an association maintained⁹⁴ by the canners. When in 1892 a Royal Commission held hearings on licenses all canners expressed opposition in principle to any restriction on licenses. But some of the long-established group--Ewen among them--indicated their willingness to go along with some

⁹⁴ Canada, British Columbia Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, Canada, S.P., 1893, no.10c,p. 113 (evidence of Alexander Ewen).

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form of restriction. Henry Bell-Irving of Anglo-British Columbia Packing on the other hand was outspoken in his demand for the right to license as many boats per cannery as each one needed, under any
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condition. This difference is symptomatic of the conflicting needs of individual firms, a fact which continued throughout the decade to make it difficult to reach agreement on a common front on matters such as prices and orderly marketing practices.

It is tempting to see this conflict as part of a wider battle for dominance in the province between the older established business community of Victoria and the new thrusting men in rapidly growing Vancouver, and that is how at least some contemporaries saw it. Commenting on the formation of Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company Ltd., the Vancouver Board of Trade said, "The purchase by English capitalists of the salmon canneries previously financed and supplied by other cities [Victoria and San Francisco] , has resulted in making Vancouver the centre of finance, supply and distribution for the canning industries, which are very important,

95 Canada, British Columbia Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, Canada, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, p. 100 (evidence of Peter Birrell); p. 119 (evidence of Alexander Ewen); p. 194 (evidence of J. A. Laidlaw); p. 106 (evidence of Thomas E. Ladner); p. 273 (evidence of R. P. Rithet); pp. 275-6 (memorandum submitted to members of the Cannery Association). One problem that faced existing canneries was that the 350 licenses set aside for canneries were re-allotted each time a new cannery was built. Rather than face this uncertainty, some cannery men were reconciled to a limitation of cannery licenses, provided there was a fixed and known number of licenses available to each cannery.

96 Canada, Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, Canada, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, p. 328.

the Fraser River brands being among the best on the market."⁹⁷ In 1893, the Vancouver News-Advertiser boasted, "Three years ago only two canneries were owned in Vancouver. Today no less than 17⁹⁸ canneries are either owned here, or operated from this City."

This included 15 of the 26 canneries on the Fraser River, of which eight were operated by Anglo-British Columbia. All the new plants, seven in number, erected on the river in 1892 and 1893, were controlled from Vancouver.⁹⁹ The Victoria-based canneries represented the pattern of doing business that had previously prevailed in salmon canning. Until this time canneries had been separate units which for the most part were operated either by individuals or partnerships. They had mostly grown through the re-investment of profits made in canning. Their operating capital came from their agents in the form of advances covered by chattel mortgages.

By 1890, these canners were substantial men and their agents had also done well. The leading cannery agents were well able to finance the expansion of the industry. The largest of these financial houses was headed by R. P. Rithet, who had just re-organized

97 Annual Report, 1892, p. 22.

98 June 20, 1893, p. 8.

99 Canada, S.P., 1894, no. 11*, p. 286. The new plants were Terra Nova (1892), Lulu Island, Pacific Coast, Steveston, Imperial, Brunswick, and Canadian Pacific (1893). This last was a partnership involving Alex Ewen of New Westminster, but was managed by R. V. Winch of Vancouver.

his firm on the death of his partner, Andrew Welch.¹⁰⁰ When he incorporated R. P. Rithet Ltd., in 1891, the authorized capital was \$500,000. This amount was paid up by 1898, the date of the oldest surviving report on the company's shares. Rithet drew his financial resources from a wide variety of interests, including Hawaiian sugar plantations and lumber and grist mills.¹⁰¹ Robert Ward and Company was a smaller firm, which had existed under a series of names and had been associated with the canning enterprises of Alexander Ewen since his first cannery days.¹⁰² When it was incorporated it had an authorized capital of \$300,000, though only \$61,500 was paid up in 1900.¹⁰³ Ward's special strength, however, lay in his close family ties with the Bank of British Columbia, where his brother W. C. Ward was manager of the most important British Columbia branch, that of Victoria, from 1867 to 1897.¹⁰⁴ Together with other smaller Victoria

100 Welch's obituary said he had "acquired his wealth on the Pacific Coast, having come to Victoria as a book-keeper in Anderson and Anderson's" (Colonist, July 26, 1889, p. 4).

101 B.C. Reg. of Cos., File 30 (1890) [microfilm] .

102 Under the firm name of Lowe, Stahlschmidt they were listed as agents for A. Ewen and Co. in 1871 (Victoria Standard, Jan. 16, 1871, p. 2). When Ward married Thomas Stahlschmidt's daughter in 1876 (Colonist, Aug. 29, 1948, Mag. Sect., p. 6) the firm became Stahlschmidt and Ward, and in 1881, Robert Ward and Company (Victoria Illustrated, Ellis and Co., 1891, p. 88).

103 B.C. Reg. of Cos., File 76 (1890) [microfilm] .

104 See Henry Doyle on this point. "It was generally recognized that if Ward and Company had the selling agency of a canning company the Bank of British Columbia handled its financial affairs . . ." ("Pacific Salmon Fisheries," vol. 1, p. 216).

firms like Turner, Beeton and Company,¹⁰⁵ Walter Morris and Company,¹⁰⁶ they financed part of the expansion of the 1890's on the Fraser River.

The new entrant into the industry was, however, not set up or financed in the traditional way. Typically, a limited company was formed, most new entrants having their headquarters in Vancouver or, in fewer cases, in New Westminster. Where they had agents, they were in Vancouver and new names like Farrell, Tregent and Company,¹⁰⁷ and George I. Wilson are prominent by the end of the decade. The largest agent was Evans, Coleman and Evans, who were backed by the English firm of Balfour, Williamson and their Pacific Coast subsidiary,¹⁰⁸ Balfour, Guthrie. Financing was increasingly done through banks--Canadian banks came into the province in numbers in the 1890's. When the crisis of 1901 hit the industry, it was to the Bank of Montreal and the Canadian Bank of Commerce, then the principal backers of the industry, that Henry Doyle turned in his efforts to organize a new syndicate. The role of the agents was confined to

¹⁰⁵ Turner, Beeton and Co. were first interested in northern canneries, but by 1898 they were agents for three Fraser River canneries, at least one of which they owned (Canada, S.P., 1900, no. 11a, p. 202; B.C. Reg. of Cos., File 434 (1862) [microfilm]).

¹⁰⁶ Walter Morris and Co., were agents and shareholders in Federation Brand Salmon Canning Company, Limited Liability, which by 1898 operated Lighthouse Cannery on the Fraser (Canada, S.P., 1900, no. 11a, p. 202; B.C. Reg. of Cos., File 118 (1890) [microfilm]).

¹⁰⁷ Henderson's British Columbia Gazetteer and Directory, 1900-1901, pp. 159-160.

¹⁰⁸ Doyle, "Pacific Salmon Fisheries," vol. 1, p. 194.

persuading the canneries for whom they acted to join the syndicate,
not in providing finance--an indication of their lesser role in
109
that area.

The strike of 1900, the major topic of the present study, was only the culmination of a series of disputes between cannery operators and fishermen during the 1890's. To the understanding of these disputes, certain facts of the growth of the salmon canning industry on the Fraser River have been found relevant. The factory methods developed for large-scale processing created an ever-growing demand for labor. This demand was difficult to satisfy from among the small population of British Columbia, and labor remained in short supply, in spite of the recruitment of native Indians and immigrant Chinese. Finding markets was relatively easy, since canned salmon from the Fraser River simply followed in the British market where the similar product of the Columbia River had led. More of a hindrance to growth in the first 20 years was a lack of capital, which accumulated but slowly from the profits of the industry and the limited financial resources of the Pacific Coast. The method of accumulation produced, in turn, the close relationship between the operators and their financial and selling agents, that characterized the corporate structure of the industry up to 1890.

109 Doyle, "Pacific Salmon Fisheries," vol. 1, pp. 214, 237.

CHAPTER II

THE FRASER RIVER SALMON CANNING INDUSTRY--LICENSE LIMITATION AND PRICE CHANGES IN THE 1890'S

The first trade union of fishermen on the Fraser River was organized in the spring of 1893, and led a short and unsuccessful strike at the start of the sockeye season of that year. In analysing the beginnings of trade unionism among these fishermen, Percy Gladstone and Stuart Jamieson argue that "the major motive impelling the Fraser River fishermen to unionize was not so much to achieve wage or price increases as such, as to protect themselves against growing competition from outside sources."¹ They identify three of these outside sources: American fishermen coming from the Columbia and Sacramento Rivers, Indians migrating from northern coastal communities, and Japanese arriving from their homeland. In the conditions of economic depression and mass unemployment existing in 1893, so runs their argument, sharpened group antagonisms produced an attempt to reduce the number of licenses to Orientals. The union organized out of this struggle, the Fraser River Fishermen's Protective Union, led a strike of fishermen for a 50-cent-a-day wage increase.

1 Percy Gladstone and Stuart Jamieson, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," CJEPS, vol. 16 (May 1950), p. 153.

According to Gladstone and Jamieson, "A pattern of organized conflict that was familiar in a number of subsequent disputes in the Fraser River fishing industry immediately developed in the 1893 strike."² The elements that they isolate in the pattern include: attempts by the cannery operators to use Japanese and Indians as strikebreakers against white fishermen; violence by unionists in response to these attempts; use of special police and the arrest of unionists; and a solidarity among the Indians in opposition to the Japanese, not matched by the white fishermen.

An examination of disputes between cannery operators and fishermen during the 1890's will enable an assessment of the merits of this view, as well as providing data on the circumstances in which fishermen's unions were organized.

Prior to the beginning of license limitation in 1889, the great majority of fishermen for the salmon canneries were Indians who worked only during the sockeye season in July and August.³ Payment to them by the canneries was sometimes by the fish--prices per 100 were reported--but generally they worked for wages.⁴ The rate at the end of the 1880's was \$2.25 a day for the fisherman and \$2.00

² Gladstone and Jamieson, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," CJEPS, vol. 16 (May 1950), p. 154.

³ Canada, S.P., 1888, no. 6, p. 257; Table V, p. 48 below [Gillnet licenses].

⁴ Canada, Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, p. 129 (evidence of Musquam Charlie).

for his partner in the gillnet boat, the boat-puller.⁵ Fishermen of European descent were in a distinct minority,⁶ but most of them also fished in the spring and fall to supply the fresh fish market.⁷ With completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway to Vancouver in 1887, a market for fish shipped in ice began to open up in Eastern Canada and the United States, and the number of men employed in this fishery increased.⁸

License regulations in the season from 1889 to 1891 fixed the total number of licenses allowed on the Fraser River first at 450, and then at 500. Of these, 350 were allotted to canneries and 100 (increased in 1890 to 150) were reserved for "outside" fishermen, including those fishing for the local and export markets in fresh fish.⁹ However, no control was exercised over the erection of new canneries on the river, and the cannery licenses had to be redistributed to provide for the newcomers. Five new canneries operated in 1890 and a sixth opened in 1891.¹⁰ This pressure on a limited

5 Vancouver News-Advertiser (hereafter cited as News-Advertiser), Aug. 2, 1891, p. 2.

6 Canada, Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, p. xx.

7 I personally dislike the use of the word "white" but it is invariably used in contemporary sources and is hereafter substituted for the more cumbersome "of European descent" or "of European birth."

8 For reports of the increased activities in the spring of 1893, see Colonist, March 24, 1893, p. 2; March 28, p. 2.

9 See above p. 34.

10 Canada, S.P., 1892, no. 11a, p. 168; ibid., 1893, no. 10a, p. 155.

number of licenses was increased by certain established firms, who, in order to get a larger quota of the licenses, erected "dummy" canneries with no intention of operating them. Four plants of this type were reported in existence by the season of 1891.¹¹ The number of licenses available to each cannery therefore shrank; it was said to be 40 in the season of 1889, 25 in 1890, and only 20 in 1891.¹²

In an attempt to ensure a large enough supply of fish, the cannery operators began to bid for the services of the holders of "outside" licenses and entered into contracts for the delivery of the catch of individual license holders. The cost to the canneries of fish bought from contract fishermen was higher than the cost of fish caught on their own licenses--both canners and fishermen agreed on that, but how much higher is difficult to say, since prices varied from season to season, as well as from day to day, and from cannery to cannery.¹³ But by 1893 ten cents per sockeye was regarded as

11 Canada, Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. 92, 407.

12 News-Advertiser, Aug. 2, 1893, p. 2.

13 Henry O. Bell-Irving of Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company, Ltd. said that fish from "outside" fishermen cost three times the average of that from the canneries' own boats. (News-Advertiser, July 15, 1893, p. 3). Capt. Alex Anderson, president of the Fraser River Fishermen's Protective and Benevolent Association, placed the cost of fish from a cannery boat at one to two cents, at a time when his organization was asking 10 cents (News-Advertiser, July 25, 1893, p. 7). Evidence was given to the Royal Commission in 1892 that the piece rate for fish prior to license limitation was one and a half to two cents (Canada, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, p. 29 - evidence of Bernard Buck).

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the customary price. Higher prices than this were paid to individual license holders to persuade them to deliver fish to a particular cannery. In the season of 1891 Alexander Ewen and Company paid up to 20 cents though their competitors were paying only 10, 12-1/2 or 15 cents.

Another kind of arrangement between company and fishermen is also recorded for the first time in this period: a share or "lay" plan. It had features of both the contract system and the daily wage. The company supplied boat and net as it did for wage-earners, but in this instance it paid for the catch by the fish and deducted approximately one-third as its share. When the price paid was 10 cents per sockeye the cannery share was three and a half cents. The six and a half cents received by the fishermen had to be divided between the two men who manned each boat. Fishing on shares appears to have begun because of license limitation; a man who could not get a license was forced to take a cannery boat. For new entrants to the industry, fishing on shares in a cannery boat was a way of getting

14 Ten cents had been widely paid in two of the previous three seasons. (Columbian, July 15, 1893, p. 1; Canada, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, p. 95).

15 Canada, Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. 14, 29, 41, 143, 151, 402. The high prices paid by Ewen appear to be the result of sales commitments he made before the season opened (ibid., p. 15). In his own testimony, he speaks of being under a bond for \$40,000 (ibid., p. 120).

16 Canada, Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. 21, 24, 66, 70, 79, 89, 95.

the experience to qualify for an individual license.¹⁷ The companies, for their part, were anxious to get the maximum production from a limited number of licenses. Substituting piece-work for daily wages was an attempt to produce a larger catch per boat. Share or "lay" arrangements were generally made with white men, but Indians, because¹⁸ they were considered to be less productive, stayed on the daily wage.

Contract fishermen became a privileged group among fishermen; they received higher prices and, in times of an over-supply of fish, they continued to deliver when the cannery's own boats were¹⁹ taken off. As Henry O. Bell-Irving succinctly put it, "a fishing²⁰ license was a valuable document." These privileges excited the envy of the fishermen on shares or daily wages. When the British Columbia Fishery Commission held its public hearings in New Westminster and Vancouver in February and March, 1892, a parade of fishermen, both white and Indian, appeared before it to complain²¹ that they could not get licenses. Their complaints apparently

17 The regulations in force at the time did not specify the qualifications of an applicant for an individual license. This gave considerable discretionary powers to the Inspector of Fisheries. Thomas Mowat, the incumbent in the position during 1889-1891, made it clear that he gave preference to what he termed "bona fide fishermen," the criteria being previous experience plus a previous individual license. (Canada, S.P., 1890, no. 17, p. 254).

18 Canada, Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. 12, 108, 417; Rounsefell and Kelez, Fraser River Salmon Fisheries, pp. 705-7; and Table VI, p. 75 below.

19 Canada, Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, passim.

20 News-Advertiser, July 21, 1893, p. 1.

21 Canada, Royal Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. 60-61, 64-5, 68-9, 70-71, 76, 78, 89, 181, 365, 367, 381, 385, 388, 401, 402, 403.

overshadowed in the commissioners' minds those of the canners and their agents who argued that they needed a greater number of licenses than the 20 which most canneries were then getting.²²

The commissioners had to adjudicate between the charge laid by the fishermen that the canners were monopolizing the river, and the claims of the canners that more licenses of their own were needed to protect them against demands made by the contract fishermen for higher prices. The canners lost this argument: all the commissioners agreed that restrictions on the number of cannery licenses should be continued. The majority report recommended the issuing of 18 licenses to each operating cannery.²³ The minority report favored 25, the figure suggested by a number of cannery spokesmen.²⁴

An interim arrangement had to be adopted for the season of 1892, since regulations to enforce the recommendations were not ready at the opening of the fishing season. Accordingly, in June, 1892, further regulations were added to those which had been enacted in 1890 and the industry operated under these amended rules for two

²² Canada, Royal Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. 35, 96, 111, 138, 189, 261, 269, 297, 399.

²³ The majority report was signed by the chairman, Samuel Wilmot, Superintendent of Fish Culture for the Department of Marine and Fisheries, and Sheriff W. J. Armstrong of New Westminster (Canada, Fishery Commission, "Report," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. 429-31). The minority report was signed by D. W. Higgins, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (ibid., pp. 431-3).

²⁴ Canada, Royal Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. 415, 427, 433.

seasons. The interim regulations provided that "all bona fide fishermen, being British subjects and actual residents of the province" were to qualify for one license. Provision was made for 20 licenses for each operating cannery and additional licenses for cold storage plants, exporters of iced fish and fresh fish dealers. ²⁵

The 1892 changes were announced too close to the opening of the season for their full effect to be felt that year; yet the number of licenses rose sharply from 500 to 721, with the canneries obtaining 417 licenses instead of 350, and individual fishermen 270 instead of 150. Though the number of licenses granted to both whites and Indians was higher, the largest percentage increase was obtained by Japanese who had first entered the industry about 1888. In their case the number was more than doubled. The approach of 1893, a "big" cycle year, promised an accentuation of these trends. ²⁶

The increase in the number of licenses, both to canneries and to individuals, presented the contract fishermen with a new situation in which their privileged position was threatened. More individual licenses meant more fishermen offering their catches to the canneries, and in a cycle year this threatened, at the very least, the elimination of premium prices or, even worse, a cut in the usual prices. The contract fishermen reacted to this threat

²⁵ Canada, Fishery Commission, "Report," 1892, S.P., 1893, no. 10c, pp. x-xi.

²⁶ See Table V, p. ⁴⁸ below; Canada, S.P., 1893, no. 10a, p. 153.

TABLE V
GILLNET LICENSES ON THE FRASER RIVER, 1887 - 1900,
^a
BY MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS

Year	Company	Individual			Between- bridge Licenses	Total
		Japanese	Indian	White		
1887	-	--	615	320	-	935
1888	-	10	323	167	-	500
1889	-	25	308	167	-	500
1890	-	25	308	167	-	500
1891	-	50	283	167	-	500
1892	-	108	373	240	-	721
1893	-	235	558	381	-	1,174
1894	-	417	549	701	-	1,667
1895	-	434	539	731	30	1,734
1896	-	926	530	1,130	60	2,646
1897	-	928	520	780	90	2,318
1898	-	1,321	511	690	120	2,642
1899	-	1,361	501	710	150	2,722
1900	393	1,659	555	1,076	-	3,683

^a Rounsefell and Kelez, Fraser River Salmon Fisheries, p. 706 (Table 2 - Gillnet licenses of the Puget Sound - Fraser River region, 1877-1934). The authors' note to this table says in part:

"From 1877 to 1899 the nationalities [sic] have been estimated from various notes. The company licenses before 1900 are not separated from the total, and so are allocated amongst the other types. There were no special 'between bridges [i.e., between New Westminster and Mission railway bridges]' licenses prior to 1908, so the figures from 1895 to 1899 merely represent a rough estimate of the number of this type of resident up-river fishermen before 1900."

Rounsefell and Kelez estimated the proportions of Japanese, Indian and white fishermen while attempting to measure fishing intensity. The totals, it should be noted, are from Fisheries Department records.

by banding together to ask for further changes in licensing regulations and by organizing a "Fishermen's Association."

The petition prepared and circulated by this Association urged changes in the licensing regulations, in order "to save trouble on our rivers by desperate men whose rights are being trampled under foot to satisfy the greed of monopolists." The Association demanded that Japanese be refused licenses, and that the number of cannery licenses be greatly reduced. At the same time, they asked for an unlimited number of individual licenses, these to cost \$5.00 each,²⁷ to be issued only one per person, and to be non-transferable.

The proposal to withhold licenses from Japanese attracted most attention in the press, since it lent support to the general²⁸ anti-Oriental agitation then current in the province. Editorials discussing the Association's petition chiefly contented themselves²⁹ with either supporting or attacking the anti-Japanese demands of the fishermen. Actually, however, the main concern of the petitioners was for further restrictions of all competitors, be they Japanese, cannery or fish dealers. What relative importance the fishermen attached to the anti-Japanese campaign is hard to determine; most labor-sponsored political programs of the time contained anti-

27 Colonist, May 28, 1893, p. 2.

28 The British Columbia Legislative Assembly had a number of anti-Chinese resolutions before it in the spring of 1893 (Journals, 1893, pp. 77, 85-6, 95, 138, 146).

29 Toronto Monetary Times, n.d., n.p., cited in Colonist, June 15, 1893, p. 4; Colonist, June 17, p. 4; News-Advertiser, July 15, p. 4.

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Oriental clauses. The emphasis given by the press to the fishermen's anti-Japanese sentiment was out of all proportion to the size of the problem in 1892-3, when not more than one-seventh of the
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fishermen were Japanese. By distorting the campaign for license reforms, the anti-Oriental emphasis certainly reduced its effectiveness.

Why, then, was such prominence given by the Fishermen's Association to the attack on the Japanese? Undoubtedly, it reflects their reaction to the granting of individual licenses to Japanese, which first occurred in the season of 1892. When the first 10 Japanese entered the industry in 1888, they fished for English and
32
Company's Steveston cannery, presumably on cannery licenses. During the seasons of 1889 to 1891, when individual licenses were limited largely to previous license holders, the growing number of Japanese was prevented from taking out their own licenses. With the ending in 1892 of the limitation on their numbers, individual licenses were issued to Japanese, bringing them as contract fishermen for the first time into direct competition with the white group. This occasioned the angry outburst among the whites that we have discussed.

30 See T. R. Loosmore, "The British Columbia Labor Movement and Political Action, 1879-1908," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, Oct., 1954, appendices, pp. iv, xiii, xv.

31 See Table V, p. 48 above.

32 Rounsefell and Kelez, Fraser River Salmon Fisheries, p. 705.

The charges, stressed in the preamble to the petition, that Chinese and Japanese were fraudulently getting naturalization papers to qualify for fishing licenses, are another instance of the Association's attempt to preserve the privileged position of its members. On the recommendation of the Royal Commission, a new requirement that fishermen be British subjects and resident in the province had been inserted into the interim regulations of 1892. If it could be enforced, it would strengthen the bargaining position of the resident fishermen for whom the Association spoke. The Association chose to concentrate on a politically popular attack on the Japanese, rather than on the United States fishermen who also came and went freely.³³ It may have felt that the emotional fervor of anti-Orientalism provided its best defence against the charge that it wanted these regulations enforced to create a monopoly for its members.

To get support for their demands and to recruit members the fishermen held meetings in New Westminster and Steveston. Finally, an organization, the "Fraser River Fishermen's Protective and Benevolent Association" with Alex W. Anderson, President; Thomas Steffensen, Vice-President; William Crawford, secretary; and Edward Johnson, treasurer, was incorporated under the provisions

33 Columbian, Sept. 5, 1893, p. 4.

of the provincial "Benevolent Societies Act" of 1891 (54 Vict.,
34 Chap. 41).

While the fishermen were attempting to bring public pressure on the government, the canners were quietly planning a counter-offensive against the privileged group of contract fishermen. A meeting of Fraser River canners held on July 8, 1893, fixed the price to be paid for sockeye in the coming season at
35 six cents. Newspaper reports of this meeting of the "Canners' Association" reveal a division in its ranks. Alexander Ewen, the longest established of the canners and one of the largest operators,
36 refused to join the "combine." Henry O. Bell-Irving, manager of the Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company, Limited, the newly-formed English syndicate which had seven canneries on the river, favored the price-cut. His attitude underlines the determination of the newly-formed company to establish a firm position for

34 B.C., Reg. of Cos., File 20 (Soc.) [microfilm] . The name reproduces the style of that of the "Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Association"--the only change being dictated by the necessity of registering as a benevolent society--so closely as to suggest that the older organization was used as a model.

35 This was reported to be a drop from "the usual price--ten cents" which suggests that over the period of license limitation that figure had come to be regarded as the customary one (Columbian, July 15, 1893, p. 1). No evidence on prices during the season of 1892 could be found. That year was a small one for sockeye and if it followed the pattern of 1891, prices would have ranged up to 20 cents (see page 44 above). The fact that 15 cents was mentioned in 1893 by union spokesmen in connection with the fishermen's demands, may indicate that this price had been paid in at least part of the previous season (News-Advertiser, July 18, 1893, p. 8).

36 He wished to continue to pay 10 cents, and was still paying eight cents (Columbian, July 15, 1893, p. 1).

itself in competition with the older firms in the industry.

During the subsequent dispute, Bell-Irving outlined the objective of those canners who had agreed to cut the prices:

In previous years, he said, part of the licenses were assigned to the canners and part to the free fishers. The canners did not get sufficient to assure them as many fish as they might need. They engaged men by the day for their own boats and licenses but for fear they should not get enough fish they contracted at the beginning of the season with outside men by the fish for their catch of the season. To guarantee that they should get as many fish as they required the canners usually paid these outside fishermen much more than the cost of those [fish] caught in their own boats would average. They found it better, however, to do that than to be short at the end of the season. In those times a fisherman's license was a valuable document. This year all that is changed. All who care to pay the fee may get a license and the river is covered with fishermen, about 1,200 in all having been issued. The canners are thus pretty well assured of their supply and have put the price to what they consider a proper price 37

The fishermen, including all holders of individual licenses, whether white, Indian, or Japanese, refused to sign contracts at the reduced price and held out for 10 cents. ³⁸ It is probable that they were supported by share or "lay" men who would also be affected. The tactics, apparently agreed upon at the fishermen's mass meeting ³⁹ on Saturday July 8, unfolded in the next week. A letter was dispatched to each of the canners asking him to meet with a committee

37 News-Advertiser, July 21, 1893, p. 1.

38 Columbian, July 15, 1893, p. 1.

39. Ibid., July 11, 1893, p. 4.

of five from the Fishermen's Association at Ladner's Landing on
Friday July 14 to negotiate a settlement of the dispute.⁴⁰ When,
on Friday morning, the fishermen who supported the Association
refused to work, a strike had begun.⁴¹ None of the canners, not
excluding the dissident Alex Ewen, would meet with the fishermen's
committee.⁴²

Having thus decided not to negotiate, the canners concentrated on winning the dispute with the fishermen. Their opening move was to insert an advertisement in the New Westminster and Vancouver newspapers, signed by all the canning companies--Ewen and Company along with the rest--offering a \$50.00 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone cutting nets, or damaging other property, intimidating fishermen or preventing them from performing their duties, inciting to unlawful acts, or "using violence or threat of violence to any person or persons in pursuance of any combination or conspiracy to raise the rate of wages."⁴³

⁴⁰ Columbian, July 18, 1893, p. 4; News-Advertiser, July 18, p. 4.

⁴¹ Ibid., July 15, 1893, p. 1.

⁴² A Fishermen's Association letter to the press alleged they were reported as saying "they would never lower themselves to meet common fishermen and paupers" (Columbian, July 19, 1893, p. 1). Mr. Bell-Irving, for his part, complained that "because we refuse to meet them, we, the canners, are now called monopolists and such names" (News-Advertiser, July 15, 1893, p. 3).

⁴³ Vancouver News-Advertiser, July 15, 1893, p. 1 (running to July 28); Vancouver World (hereafter cited as World), July 15, p. 2 (to July 28); New Westminster Columbian, July 15, p. 4 (to July 29).

This legal phraseology seems to have been chosen to frighten the unsophisticated into believing that any group action by fishermen was somehow illegal. The section quoted above paraphrased Section 524 of the Criminal Code of Canada, 1892 (55-56 Victoria, Chap. 29), but with a significant omission designed to strengthen the implication that any group action by fishermen was illegal. The canners' version of the section omitted the word "unlawful" (plentifully sprinkled through the preceding text) from in front of "combination and conspiracy." In fact, the Criminal Code specifically exempted combinations of workmen as such from prosecution for conspiracy, so long as they did nothing that was otherwise illegal (s.s. 516-9). The ambiguous position of trade unions under the law of conspiracy, then and later, laid working men open to this type of pressure from employers.⁴⁴

The suggestion that the fishermen were committing, or were about to commit, "unlawful" acts was followed up with direct charges that the fishermen were, in fact, intimidating the Indians so as to prevent them from going fishing. Some of the charges seem to be based on the union's methods in collecting dues from and issuing membership cards to Indians. Some Indians were said to have regarded the card either as a license, without which they could not fish, or as a new revenue tax.⁴⁵ The Hon. J. H. Turner,

⁴⁴ Canada, Department of Labor, Trade Union Law in Canada, Ottawa, King's Printer, 1935, pp. 22-24.

⁴⁵ News-Advertiser, July 15, 1893, p. 3; July 18, p. 3.

Provincial Minister of Finance, and himself a canner with interests on the Fraser River, wired Premier Davie asking for provincial police to be sent to communities along the Fraser. Half-breeds, charged with intimidation, were arrested.

The Fishermen's Association was placed on the defensive, but their officers promptly denied the charges, saying they would "use their best endeavours to prevent any acts of lawlessness on the part of members of the Association." The Association, in turn, charged that the canners were "using all legal and illegal means in their power to put down 'this conspiracy to raise the rate of wages' as they call the Fishermen's Association." Specifically they charged Indian agents, cannery owners and even a priest with using undue influence to get the Indians to return to work.

Behind these charges and counter-charges lay the crucial struggle for the support of the fishermen, a great majority of them Indians, who fished for daily wages in cannery boats. In numbers they probably represented from one-third to one-half of the

⁴⁶ News-Advertiser, July 15, 1893, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid. The harassing nature of these arrests can be judged by the cases being adjourned several times at the request of the prosecutors until the strike was over, when the charges were apparently quietly dropped (Columbian, July 20, 1893, p. 1; Aug. 3, p. 4).

⁴⁸ Columbian, July 15, 1893, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

approximately 2,350 men involved. For either side to win, it must get the allegiance of the men on daily wages. On the day the strike began, the Association announced that its demands included one for \$3.00 a day for "boatmen." But the canners had already partially forestalled this strategem by offering a raise of 25 cents over⁵¹ previous years to \$2.50 and \$2.25.

The canners did not, however, rely solely on the offer of an increase in wages to lure the Indians back to work. As the Fishermen's Association charged, they enlisted the help of federal Indian Affairs officials. On Sunday July 16, just before the weekly opening, A. W. Vowell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for British Columbia, toured the Indian camps at Steveston with the Indian Agent from the Cowichan district, W. H. Lomas.⁵² With Vowell and Lomas went William Moresby, governor of the provincial gaol at New Westminster. They told the Indians that they were free to go

50 The number of men on daily wages is difficult to estimate. A total of 1,174 licenses was issued on the Fraser in 1893. Rounsefell and Kelez estimate that Indians got 558 of them (See Table V, p. 48 above). At two men per license, this would mean about 1,100 Indians were involved. But not all Indians were wage earners and not all wage workers were Indians. Anderson, the union president, claimed a membership of 1,600. His figures of 1,287 licenses to whites and Indians and 63 to Japanese gives too high a total, while underestimating the Japanese share and not differentiating between cannery licenses and individual licenses (News-Advertiser, July 18, 1893, p. 8).

51 Columbian, July 15, 1893, p. 1. The rate in recent seasons had been \$2.25 for fishermen and \$2.00 for boat-pullers.

52 World, July 15, 1893, p. 2.

to work and should make their own private arrangements with the canners. It was reasonable enough advice, but, as advice given in the presence of a provincial gaol official who also performed⁵³ police duties, it could easily be construed as intimidation.

Also lending their presence to attempts to get the Indians back to work were a number of special constables, under a provincial police sergeant who had been dispatched by the Davie government in response⁵⁴ to Turner's request. An Indian chief who supported the strikers, declared: "At Ladner's there were so many constables they tried⁵⁵ to scare the Indians to go fishing."

A number of Indians, whether intimidated or persuaded, went⁵⁶ back to work on Sunday night. There is some question as to the exact number, but a Vancouver steamer, bearing excursionists returning after a day's visit to the canneries in Steveston, reported that the river was so choked with nets after the six⁵⁷ o'clock opening that the vessel found passage difficult. Once any return to work had begun, however, the issue of the strike could not be long in doubt. The weakness of the strikers' position was

53 Colonist, July 18, 1893, p. 2; News-Advertiser, July 18, p. 1.

54 News-Advertiser, July 16, 1893, p. 3.

55 Ibid., July 25, 1893, p. 7.

56 Colonist, July 18, 1893, p. 2; News-Advertiser, July 18, p. 1.

57 World, July 17, 1893, p. 4.

underlined by pronouncements by canners to the effect that no out-
side boats would be needed for the season.⁵⁸ This action was
undoubtedly an attempt to influence the strikers though the
experience of previous years of a heavy run had indicated that
far less than the 20 boats allowed could catch all that a cannery
could process.⁵⁹ By the end of the first week, all the Indians
were reported to be fishing and a number of "Austrians" had also
gone back.⁶⁰ There was also a report that "a few" of the Assoc-
iation members had made "private arrangements" with the canneries
and were fishing again.⁶¹

The strike apparently ended on Sunday night, July 23, with
most of the fishermen going back to work on whatever terms they were
able to arrange with the canners.⁶² When the strike was at its last
gasp, the Association made a final appeal to public opinion at a
mass meeting held in the Market Hall in Vancouver the previous
evening. The diminishing support for the strike can be measured
by the size of the audience: only 200 fishermen and 50 members of
the public. The meeting passed two resolutions. One condemned the

58 Colonist, July 19, 1893, p. 2.

59 Canada, Fishery Commission, "Minutes," 1892, S.P., 1893,
no. 10c, passim.

60 World, July 22, 1893, p. 4.

61 Columbian, July 22, 1893, p. 4.

62 Columbian, July 24, 1893, p. 4; Colonist, July 25, p. 2.

Indian Agents for "using their influence as Government officials to induce them [the Indians] to return to work for starvation wages." The second repeated the demand that "the number of fishing licenses granted to the canneries should be greatly reduced" and added that "all licenses illegally granted to Japanese and canneries in name⁶³ only should be immediately cancelled."

The strike of 1893 was defeated chiefly by the solid front⁶⁴ maintained by the cannerymen during a time of economic depression,⁶⁵ but there were also a number of other reasons. The Association had been unable to hold together the diverse group that it sought to lead. The contract fishermen were chiefly concerned about licenses and fish prices. Their support of a raise for men on daily wages appears as almost an afterthought. They were unable to hold the Indians in face of the raise in daily rates offered by the cannerymen, and of the pressure that the cannerymen brought to bear on them through government officials. Towards the Japanese, their attitude was ambivalent. On one hand, they boasted of Japanese support for the Association, and, on the other, refused to let them join its ranks,

63 News-Advertiser, July 25, 1893, p. 4; Columbian, July 25, p. 4.

64 As Henry Bell-Irving remarked, "on this occasion at least the cannerymen had taken united action," a wry commentary on their previous failures in this direction (News-Advertiser, July 15, 1893, p. 3).

65 By the beginning of the second week of the strike, the Colonist carried a Vancouver report stating: "Every stage for Steveston is crowded with men going to work in the canneries" (Colonist, Aug. 20, 1893, p. 2). Other reports of the time stress the unemployment prevalent in Vancouver.

even though the Japanese apparently asked either to be admitted, or alternatively, offered \$500 if the Association would set up a
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separate union for them.

This dispute, although brief, is important because in many respects it anticipates the problems of the strike of 1900. The refusal to accept a price cut, the ad hoc character of the fishermen's organization, the stresses among ethnic groups, the aggressive tactics of the canners, the appeal to public opinion and the role of the provincial police--all figure in the later dispute.

The strike of 1893 having failed, the Fraser River Fishermen's Protective and Benevolent Association faded from public view.
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During the rest of the 1890's, the fishermen were at the mercy of supply and demand in the setting of fish prices. For the remainder of the season of 1893, prices varied according to the pack prospects. The expected big run did not commence until the beginning of the
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week of August 20. In the meantime, prices rose to eight cents, then to 12-1/2, and even to 15 cents. When the price was still at eight cents some of the "free" fishermen--individual license holders--
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refused to fish unless they got 10 cents. When the big run did

66 News-Advertiser, July 18, 1893, p. 8.

67 It at least survived the strike, holding a meeting in Steveston to apply for admission to the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council (Colonist, Aug. 5, 1893, p. 2). Three hundred fishermen, probably the hard core of the Association's support, marched in the Labor Day parade (ibid., Aug. 26, p. 2).

68 Colonist, Aug. 22, 1893, p. 2.

69 Ibid., Aug. 4, 1893, p. 2; Aug. 9, p. 2; Aug. 17, p. 2.

come, the slow-moving cannery lines were soon over-supplied with fish. The fishermen then experienced what must have seemed to them the other side of a "heads I win, tails you lose" situation: just when they could make some money, they were limited in their deliveries to the canneries.⁷⁰ The season ended with full packs for the canneries and reports that the fishermen's average earnings, in spite of the larger number of fishermen, were equal to those of previous years, a situation that neither canneries nor fishermen could expect to be repeated in subsequent off-years.⁷¹

An analysis of price trends in the succeeding season^s of the 1890's will help to establish the problems of the fishermen facing price fluctuations without any form of bargaining group to assist him in his negotiations with the cannery operators. This, in turn, may serve to identify the types of difficulties that he tried to solve through organization and collective action.

Increasing competition for fish is mirrored in the prices paid in the 1894 season. The canners met before the season to decide on the price and apparently set eight cents as the rate.⁷² But not all operators were prepared to "hold the line." When the run continued poor into August, prices shot up. An "unprecedented" 25 cents was paid by one cannery while others paid 15 and 20 cents.

70 Colonist, Aug. 25, 1893, p. 2.

71 Columbian, Aug. 30, 1893, p. 4; Sept. 1, p. 4.

72 Colonist, July 20, 1894, p. 2.

The canneries that kept the old scale were forced to offer the counter-attraction of accepting all fish delivered--a promise that⁷³ meant no limit even in heavy runs. When the run improved, some canners led an attempt to cut back to the eight-cent level, but⁷⁴ only about two-thirds of them followed this lead. The season⁷⁵ ended with only a "three-quarter" pack on the Fraser and the canners holding large unsold and uncommitted stocks for a rise in⁷⁶ London prices.

The high prices paid in 1894 had their effect on the next season. Although 1895 was an "off" year for sockeye the run was expected to be early and to come with a rush. The contract fishermen, therefore, asked for higher prices and this in turn caused a rush of would-be fishermen, attracted by the prospect of 25 cents⁷⁷ per fish. That year the canners were unable to agree at all on a price: Anglo-British Columbia Packing, which had maintained a hard line on prices since its formation in 1891, announced that, in the absence of any agreement, it would pay 25 cents through the

73 Colonist, Aug. 5, 1894, p. 2.

74 Ibid., Aug. 8, 1894, p. 2.

75 This expression stems from the days of hand-made tins. Canners had to decide before the season opened on the number of cases they would prepare to pack, as more tins usually could not be made quickly enough to take advantage of any heavy run. A "three-quarter" pack meant only that proportion of the cans prepared had been filled.

76 Colonist, Aug. 10, 1894, p. 5; Aug. 27, p. 2.

77 Ibid., June 23, 1895, p. 2; July 11, p. 2.

whole season.⁷⁸ Some contracts also apparently contained clauses⁷⁹ allowing unlimited delivery of fish. As soon as the run began, prices, other presumably than these contracts for the season,⁸⁰ dropped. In one tremendous 24-hour period, beginning at the weekly opening on August 11, every cannery was glutted. One of Anglo-British Columbia's canneries took 40,000 fish in two days at eight⁸¹ and 10 cents each, and was reported to have been offered 100,000. The price dropped to as low as five cents and remained there after the run had eased. The fishermen responded by refusing to fish at⁸² that price.

The season of 1896 saw a continuance of the high prices of the previous year. Contracts were made with fishermen for 25 cents,⁸³ 20 cents being the lowest price offered. Some canneries experienced difficulty in getting fishermen,⁸⁴ but this situation was relieved, partly by the arrival of fishermen who left Rivers Inlet⁸⁵ because of a strike there for higher prices, and partly by the

78 Colonist, July 13, 1895, p. 2.

79 Ibid., Aug. 13, 1895, p. 1.

80 Ibid., July 16, 1895, p. 2.

81 Ibid., Aug. 18, 1895, p. 6.

82 Ibid., Aug. 15, 1895, p. 2.

83 Ibid., July 14, 1896, p. 2.

84 Ibid., July 18, 1896, p. 2.

85 Ibid., July 19, 1896, p. 2.

licensing of more Japanese. Price changes in the season closely paralleled those of 1895. When the heaviest part of the run developed in August, prices dipped to 10 and five cents, but rose again to 15 cents as it dropped off.⁸⁷ Problems arose with contract fishermen, for apparently their contracts that season permitted no price drop. When the supply of fish became abundant, the canneries simply refused to honor the contract price of 25 cents. The fishermen involved resisted the price cut, but, it was reported, "after much consideration and a few threats a compromise was made--20 cents⁸⁸ being the figure to canners who made contracts." That the threats, whatever they were, were not acted on, simply spells out how vulnerable even the fishermen holding a contract were to unilateral action by the canners.

Both canners and fishermen approached the season of 1897 in expectation that it would be a "big" year. Before sockeye fishing started, 16 of the canners on the lower reaches of the river around Steveston and Ladner's, met and agreed that they would offer only eight cents a fish. This decision caused an uproar among the fishermen who had gathered for the season's opening. The protest was spontaneous, since no organization then existed; neither was any formal organization set up during the short dispute. First to balk

86 Colonist, July 31, 1896, p. 2.

87 Columbian, Aug. 11, 1896, p. 4; Aug. 12, p. 4; Aug. 19, p. 4.

88 Colonist, Aug. 15, 1896, p. 2.

at the declared price was a group of Indian fishermen, numbering 300 to 400, who announced that they were on strike, and would return home, unless they were paid 25 cents a fish, the price during most of the previous season.⁸⁹ The Japanese followed as a group, asking for 15 cents.⁹⁰ The white fishermen joined them, somewhat unwillingly, a number standing aloof, particularly some of the men having their own gear.⁹¹ These men, who made up the once-privileged contract group, seem to have disliked the Japanese so much as to be unable to co-operate with them, even to their own advantage.

The three groups were unwilling to give up their separate identities to the point of forming any kind of common organization. Each met separately, and then jointly in a mass meeting at Steveston. This meeting elected a committee to ask the canners to sign an agreement to pay not less than 15 cents a fish for the entire season--a compromise price between the whites' preference for 15 cents to open and not less than 10 cents,⁹² and the Indians' demand for 25 cents throughout the season.⁹³ Reports of the dispute suggest that some white fishermen did not like the 15-cent figure simply because it had been first proposed by the Japanese. If this same

89 Columbian, July 8, 1897, p. 1.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., July 12, 1897, p. 1.

92 Ibid., July 13, 1897, p. 4.

93 Ibid., July 9, 1897, p. 1.

source can be believed, they were also reluctant to sign a "no 15 cents, no fish" pledge partly because it had originated as a Japanese idea.⁹⁴

It is highly unlikely that the cannery owners agreed even to meet the committee, but they did hold a meeting among themselves in Vancouver that Saturday and raised the opening price to 10 cents.⁹⁵ This figure was acceptable to a good many white fishermen and their acceptance probably influenced the other groups. In any case, all went back to work without any significant loss of fishing time during the run. Subsequently some refusals by the canneries to take on the "kickers" was reported, and the whole dispute blamed on "American agitators," although with what justification is not known.⁹⁶

Some features of this dispute underline the changes in canner-fishermen relations that had taken place since the last dispute in 1893. Indians, who in 1893 had been on daily wages, were now, at Steveston at least, on piece-work--in fact, some of them expressed a desire to go back to the former system.⁹⁷ This older method of payment had not been entirely eliminated, however,

94 Columbian, July 12, 1897, p. 1.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid., July 13, 1897, p. 4. Numbers of fishermen from the U.S. fished on the Fraser that season (Columbian, Aug. 19, 1897, p. 1). Perhaps some of them had had experience in the Columbia River strike of 1896 (Columbian, Aug. 27, 1896, p. 4) and that formed the basis of the report.

97 Columbian, July 9, 1897, p. 1.

as New Westminster canneries still had some men on daily wages.⁹⁸

The progress of the 1897 season was a vivid demonstration of problems facing the fishermen. A heavy run, one of the largest in the history of the Fraser, set in and lasted two and a half weeks. Even the greatly increased number of canneries since the last "big" year was unable to handle the fish. Prices dropped as low as two cents and limits were everywhere put on deliveries. So heavy was the run that the fishermen were left with thousands of fish on their hands for which no sale existed.⁹⁹ A few fish were salted but thousands were thrown away each day--some estimates range as high as 100,000 a day.¹⁰⁰ Small consolation to the fishermen, then, that the pack was the largest yet on the Fraser River. Nor were they much comforted by newspaper observations that "this is not their year"¹⁰¹ and the hopes expressed that they could "make a little money"¹⁰² by fishing the tail end of the run.

The season of 1898 saw another flare-up among fishermen. That season was a failure compared with the years just previous to it, or indeed, with corresponding years in other four-year cycles.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Columbian, July 9, 1897, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Ibid., July 26, 1897, p. 1; July 28, p. 4; July 31, p. 4; Aug. 2, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Aug. 5, 1897, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Aug. 9, 1897, p. 3.

¹⁰² Ibid., Aug. 5, 1897, p. 4; Aug. 11, p. 4.

¹⁰³ See Table II, p. 8 above.

The price of fish, therefore, stayed at 15 cents in the first part of the season. A sudden spurt on the evening of a weekly Sunday opening caused some canneries to cut the price--prematurely, as it turned out--to 10 cents.¹⁰⁴ This time the fishermen with their own gear and those on shares refused to work. The cut in prices had been made only by a few canneries and these soon found out they could not sustain such an action without majority support.¹⁰⁵ Individual settlements ended the walkout and the price returned to 15 cents; then it climbed, as the run stayed light, to 20, 22-1/2 and 25 cents.¹⁰⁶ This high price did not mean too much for, as one report commented, "the fish are not running so the price is immaterial."¹⁰⁷ The pack, when complete, was the smallest on the Fraser since 1892.¹⁰⁸

In 1899, prices went even higher than they had been in 1898. The season opened with a price of 25 cents and the prospect of its reaching 30 cents.¹⁰⁹ The 25-cent level was maintained through practically the whole season except for a brief slump to 15 cents during a temporary glut.¹¹⁰ The size of the run does not

104 Columbian, Aug. 2, 1898, p. 4.

105 Ibid., Aug. 3, 1898, p. 3.

106 Ibid., Aug. 15, 1898, p. 4; Aug. 17, p. 4.

107 Ibid., Aug. 17, 1898, p. 4.

108 See Table II, p. 8 above.

109 Colonist, July 16, 1899, p. 5.

110 Ibid., Aug. 15, 1899, p. 1; Aug. 18, p. 2; Aug. 25, p. 2; Aug. 26, p. 2; Sept. 1, p. 5.

explain this price level as it does that of 1898, since the pack was¹¹¹ in fact second only to the record catch of 1897. Competition among the large number of canneries is the only explanation that can be offered.

Although wide fluctuations in price occurred both during each season and between seasons, the trend during the period from 1893 to 1899 was for prices to rise. This created problems for the cannery operator, who was faced with an ever higher cost for his raw material. Yet the individual fisherman, because of more competition in his trade, limitations on deliveries and price changes during the course of the fishing season, did not always benefit from the higher prices.

The opposing interests of canners and fishermen in the matter of fish prices, produced a conflict that had become endemic in the industry by the end of the 1890's. This conflict did not, however, of itself result in an organization of fishermen. The formation in 1893 of the Fraser River Fishermen's Protective and Benevolent Association may appear at first glance to contradict this statement, but this organization was not formed to seek price adjustments. Its objective was legislative action to change the balance of fishing licenses as between individual holders and canneries, and to alter the conditions under which licenses were

¹¹¹ See Table II, p. 8 above.

granted. The end of these changes would be to weaken the canners' control over the supply of fishermen and to create a monopoly for the contract fishermen. The strike of 1893 bore little relation to this campaign. It was in a sense forced on the Association by its members' reaction to the canners' insistence on price cuts that would undermine their privileged position. Throughout this essentially negative struggle, the Association was on the defensive.

If the strike was a diversion of the Association from its main purpose, then its reluctance to assume the leadership of all fishermen regardless of ethnic group, or whether they were on contract, shares or wages, and failure to hold together this motley group, is understandable. The approach to the Indians and the inclusion of the demand for a raise in daily wages appears to have been made only at the last minute. The Association rebuffed the Japanese when they tried to join it, even though the Japanese of their own accord adopted the Association's price demands. It stood by while the Indians were persuaded, by methods amounting to intimidation, to go back to work. Although the press was ever ready to leap on any reports of subsequent disturbances, no evidence exists of any Association attempt to interfere with fishing by non-striking fishermen. The evidence, in fact, points just the other way--to the passivity of Association members in face of the bleeding away of their support. The main resolution at the final public meeting, for instance, did not even refer to the strikers' price demands, but repeated arguments for license changes.

Granting the purpose of the Association to be the protection and improvement of the position of the contract fishermen at the expense of other fishermen, then its relation both to the struggle over prices and to other fishermen, including the Japanese, becomes clear. It hoped to control prices by creating a monopoly for its members. An influx of fishermen, whether Japanese or American, could only destroy this monopoly. No organization that united all fishermen would serve the purpose of advancing the interests of a particular section. Hence the refusal to broaden the Association to include all fishermen.

This also seems to be the reason why the opportunity that existed at the opening of the season of 1897 to re-create a fishermen's organization was not taken. The protests over price cuts were in that year started by the Indians, followed by the Japanese, and only then taken up reluctantly by the white group. The logic of the situation demanded an organization embracing the three groups, but they met separately, and ineffectively, during the brief dispute. Even though the white group were again actively promoting legislative change, as will be seen in the following chapter, they were apparently prepared to accept the lower prices offered rather than submerge their special interests in an all-inclusive organization.

We must, therefore, look to the struggle over fishery regulations to find the genesis of those fishermen's organizations that were to lead the 1900 strike.

CHAPTER III

FISHERY REGULATIONS AND THE FORMATION OF FISHERMEN'S UNIONS

The struggle that convinced fishermen of their need to organize for the protection of their collective interests centred in the regulations governing fishing, regulations that came under the jurisdiction of the federal Department of Marine and Fisheries. As we have seen, the very first short-lived fishermen's organization in 1893 was formed to influence expected new regulations to the advantage of its members.¹ In this aim, the Association, though as a body it did not survive its involvement in the 1893 strike, was at least partially successful. The regulations adopted in 1894 provided for continuance of unlimited issuance of individual licenses, a practice that had been begun in 1892. They also limited issuance of an individual license to a "bona fide fisherman, being an actual resident of the Province of British Columbia." Each member of a firm or company and every person receiving a license had to be a British subject. Licenses were also made non-transferable. But the remedies against dummy canneries were not, as it turned out, sufficiently detailed.²

1 See page 49 above.

2 Canada, Privy Council, "Order in Council, March 3, 1894 [Fishery Regulations for the Province of British Columbia]," Canada Gazette, vol. 27 (March 17, 1894), pp. 1579-80.

Once these new regulations came into effect the agitation over the fishery regulations subsided. The position of both individual fishermen and canners remained much as it had been in the previous two seasons, and the energy of the canners was directed to a struggle for the repeal or suspensions of the regulations which required them to dispose of fish offal by towing it to deep water.³

Agitation was renewed in 1896 by two unrelated events: the continued increase in fishing intensity caused by the growing number of fishermen and the election in that year of a new Liberal government in Ottawa. The fishing pressure would, in any case, have aroused fresh discontent among the fishermen, but the coincidence of the election of a new government made them hopeful of repeating their earlier success in influencing changes in the regulations.

The steady increase in the number of licenses caused a comparable drop in the catch per unit of effort.⁴ This drop, to a large extent, offset rising sockeye prices in the 1890's. No relief appeared to be in sight for the fisherman as he watched the issuances of licenses increase in good years and bad.⁵

³ Colonist, Sept. 30, 1894, p. 6; Oct. 14, p. 6; Oct. 16, p. 6; Nov. 1, pp. 6-7; Nov. 22, p. 4; Dec. 11, p. 8; Dec. 12, p. 4; May 17, 1895, pp. 4, 5; May 24, p. 4.

⁴ See Table VI and Figure I, pp. 75 and 76 below.

⁵ From 1897 on, the annual catch very closely reflected the abundance of sockeye, thus suggesting that the river was close to its point of maximum utilization. Prior to that date, other factors, discussed previously, limited the catch (Ward and Larkin, Cyclic Dominance in Adams River Sockeye, p. 10).

TABLE VI
CATCH PER UNIT OF EFFORT BY GILLNETS
*
ON THE FRASER RIVER, 1888 - 1901

Year	Number Gillnetted	Total Units of Effort	Catch Per Unit of Effort
1888	433,000	576	752
1889	3,651,393	596	6,126
1890	2,263,250	596	3,797
1891	1,296,937	629	2,062
1892	543,100	954	569
1893	5,397,005	1,626	3,319
1894	3,737,200	2,481	1,506
1895	4,033,720	2,580	1,563
1896	3,120,523	4,291	727
1897	9,959,350	3,832	2,599
1898	2,293,715	4,642	494
1899	4,514,385	4,785	943
1900	1,873,981	6,369	294
1901	11,792,692	6,350	1,857

* Rounsefell and Kelez, Fraser River Salmon Fisheries, p. 766. The concept of "unit of effort" of Rounsefell and Kelez was developed to measure the intensity of gillnet fishing for the sockeye runs on the Fraser River. From the official total of licenses issued, the authors estimated the numbers of Indians, whites and Japanese getting licenses (Table 2, pp. 706-7). They then calculated the total of units of fishing effort by assigning each license a weight, according to their estimate of the fishing efficiency of each group. Indian licenses were assigned a weight of 1.00, whites 1.375 and Japanese 2.32 (p. 707). They used this total to derive an average annual catch per unit of fishing effort, by dividing it into the number of sockeye caught, which latter figure was estimated from the pack in cases. The resulting table and figure (Table 31, and Figure 23, pp. 766-7) are reproduced in the present study only for the years 1888-1901. For comparison, the cycle of years including 1900 is shown in red (see p. 3 above).

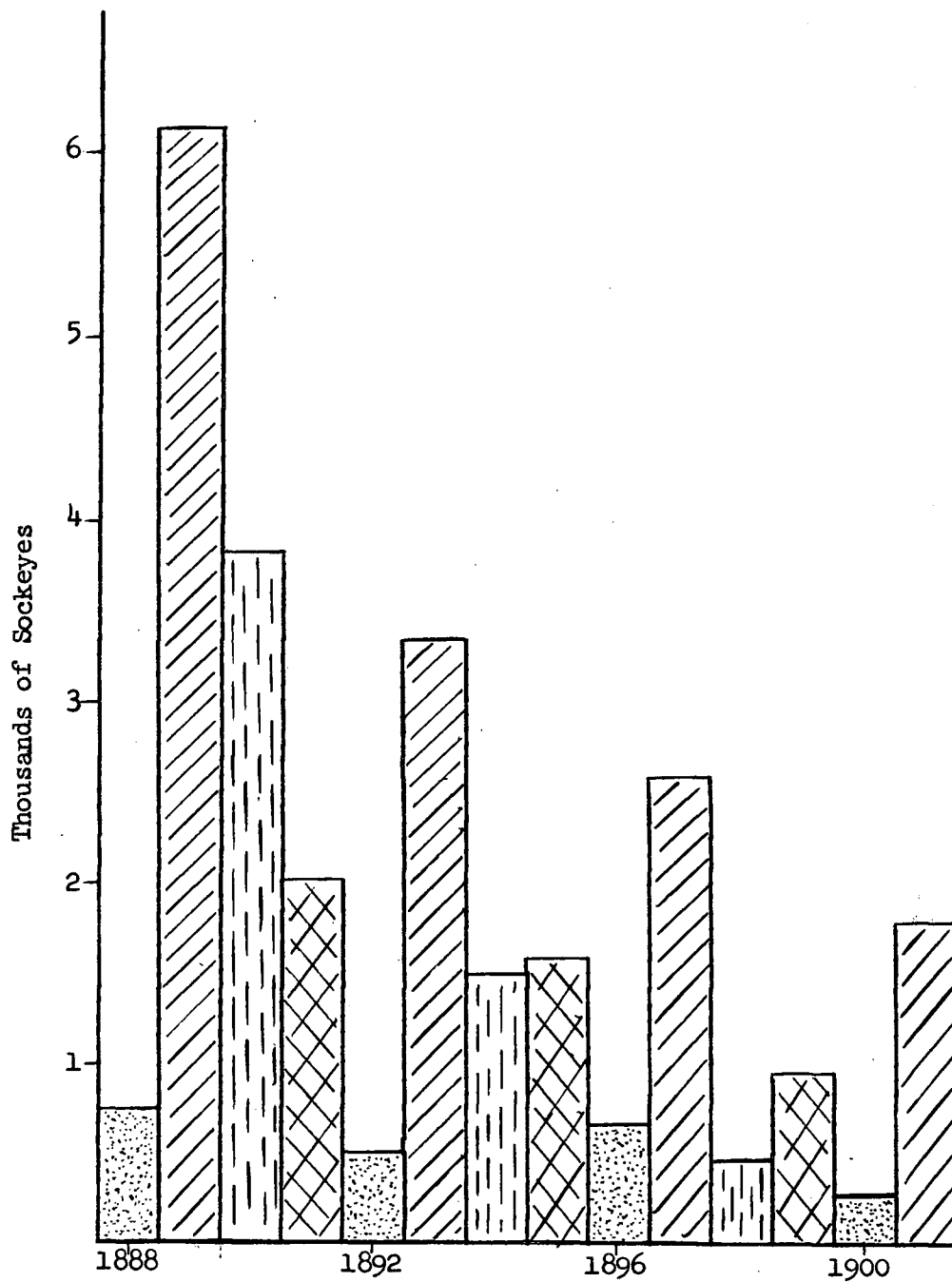


FIGURE I
CATCH PER UNIT OF EFFORT BY GILLNETS
*
ON THE FRASER RIVER, 1888 - 1901

* Rounsefell and Kelez, Fraser River Salmon Fisheries, p. 767.

The most vocal of the fishermen--the white resident group that had been the "outside" or contract fishermen during the period of license limitation--reacted by attempting to restrict the efforts of their competitors. Towards the end of the season of 1896, at a meeting in the Opera House, Steveston, a demand was made on the Dominion Government for "changes beneficial to the fishermen who are residents and voters in the Province." A committee of seven was chosen to draft a petition to the Minister of Marine and Fisheries demanding, among other changes in the regulations, that licenses be issued only to Provincial voters. Such a restriction would eliminate the competition of the Japanese who had been deprived of the vote by the Provincial legislature. A further demand for stringent enforcement of naturalization was aimed at those Americans who became "British subjects" for the duration of the fishing season, as well as at the Japanese. The fishermen also asked for a heavy duty on imports of trap-caught fish and for the abolition of traps in British Columbia waters to restrict another source of competition, the increasing catch of Fraser River salmon by the fish traps in United States waters around Point Roberts and in the Canadian reaches of Boundary Bay.⁶

Whether or not this petition was circulated is not certain,⁷

⁶ Columbian, Aug. 18, 1896, p. 4; Aug. 25, p. 4.

⁷ A petition from A. Wheeler, Vancouver, was refused endorsement by the New Westminster City Council because of its exaggerations about that city. Whether this was the fishermen's petition cannot be determined (Columbian, Sept. 15, 1896, pp. 1, 2).

but any plan to forward it to Ottawa was abandoned when it was learned that the new Minister of Marine and Fisheries, L. H. Davies, was shortly to visit British Columbia. At a second meeting in New Westminster a committee was chosen to lay the fishermen's requests before him.⁸ An address, presented to the Minister during the course of a trip made under the committee's auspices from New Westminster down the Fraser River to Steveston, repeated at some length objections to various aspects of the regulations. The main request was for the restriction of licenses to Provincial voters and bona fide fishermen.⁹ The Minister's visit marks the emergence, for the first time, of a separate group comprising fishermen who lived in Vancouver in the off-season. Meeting in the Union Hall, Hastings Street, this group passed resolutions similar to those accepted at the New Westminster and Steveston meetings, and appointed¹⁰ a committee to present resolutions to the Minister. Their deputation was headed by Robert Macpherson, a member of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, who introduced the presentation by pointed reference to the fact that these men had helped elect the new Liberal member for Burrard. The leaders of the delegation made it plain that, in opposing licenses for all aliens, Japanese or

⁸ Columbian, Oct. 26, 1896, p. 1.

⁹ Ibid., Dec. 15, 1896, p. 4; Dec. 16, p. 1.

¹⁰ World, Oct. 31, 1896, p. 5.

Americans, they spoke for resident fishermen. They also made explicit the demand that the canners be deprived of their 20 licenses.¹¹ That demand was not at all favorably received by the Minister.

In this series of meetings the fishermen for the first time had easy access to the Minister, and the assistance of Liberal politicians in smoothing the way for the presentation of their case. Both these facts might well have strengthened an impression that sympathetic consideration would be given to the redress of grievances.

There followed, however, a rather leisurely consideration of possible changes in the fishery regulations. In July, 1897, "Professor" Edward Prince, the Dominion Fisheries Commissioner, attended meetings in New Westminster and Steveston, arranged by Aulay Morrison. Prince heard spokesmen for the fishermen, including members of the committee who had met the Minister, amplify their grievances and place fresh emphasis on the unfair competition from Americans who entered British Columbia only for the sockeye season. Procedures used by Fisheries officers in handling license applications were also condemned as making easy the evasion of the requirement of British citizenship. Prince was impressed by the¹² unanimity of the fishermen's views on desirable changes.

11 News-Advertiser, Dec. 15, 1896, p. 5; World, Dec. 15, p. 5.

12 Columbian, July 26, 1897, p. 3; Aug. 2, p. 1.

None of these meetings was called by an identifiable organization, and none resulted in the setting up of more than a temporary committee for a specific object. The meetings with Professor Prince were arranged by Aulay Morrison, the New Westminster Liberal Member of Parliament who had been elected in 1896.

The suggestion that a union was needed appeared in connection with the price dispute of 1897. Just before Prince's visit, a Steveston correspondent of the Columbian remarked that "what is evidently needed is a strong Fishermen's Union to take organized action But this union cannot be established after the fish¹³ have begun to enter the river." Another Steveston correspondent reported that "the fishermen would like very much to establish a union, but they feel the task is too great, owing to the cosmopolitan character of the crowd who come here." The fishermen were said, however, to be pinning their hopes on the effective limitation of¹⁴ both fishermen and boat-pullers to British subjects.

Vancouver fishermen, did attempt at this time to set up a fishermen's union. At an organization meeting the chairman and the secretary were men who had been members of the deputation to the¹⁵ Minister of Marine and Fisheries the previous year. Though plans were made to draft a constitution and by-laws, and 38 fishermen were

¹³ Columbian, July 12, 1897, p. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid., Aug. 31, 1897, p. 3.

¹⁵ News-Advertiser, Dec. 15, 1896, p. 5.

enrolled at the meeting, the attempt came to nothing.¹⁶

One explanation for the lack of any move toward formal organization by the New Westminster and Steveston resident fishermen may lie in the enthusiasm of many of their leaders for co-operative canneries as a means of controlling the effects of price cuts during the season and limitations on deliveries of fish. Two such co-operative canneries were started at this time: one at Anniesville in 1896 by the Fraser River Industrial Society Limited¹⁷ and one at Steveston in 1897 by the Colonial Canning Company, Limited Liability.¹⁸ Several fishermen who served on committees or delegations in these years or who were later in the unions were among the organizers of these ventures.

Finally, early in 1898, the federal fisheries authorities, were ready with a draft of a complete revision of the regulations. The draft met with instant opposition from the canners on the question of licenses.¹⁹ Clauses two and three tightened the regulations in favor of the fishermen who were residents and British subjects, but for the first time required that boat-pullers have a permit. Fishermen and boat-pullers were to be required to register with the

16 News-Advertiser, Sept. 8, 1897, p. 5; World, Sept. 8, p. 8.

17 B.C. Reg. of Cos., File 63 (Co-op) [microfilm] .

18 Ibid., File 413 (1890) [microfilm] .

19 What the exact proposals were cannot be said since no copy of the draft is available to me.

Inspector of Fisheries by March 31st and from this register would be taken the names of applicants for licenses and permits. If this regulation were enforced, it would obviously disqualify Japanese who arrived by steamer just before the sockeye season and Americans who came to the Fraser for the July opening. But it would also disqualify, as the canners pointed out, a number of men who worked for the remainder of the year in industries in other parts of the Province. In addition to their objection to the procedure for granting individual licenses, the canners objected strenuously to the proposal to cut
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cannery licenses to ten.

That the weight of the proposed new regulations favoured the fishermen can be judged from the reactions from the two groups--the fishermen and the canners. At a meeting in New Westminster, fishermen had practically no amendments to offer and the few put forward
21
did not refer to the licensing system. The canners, in contrast, not only suggested extensive amendments, but sought to delay proclamation of the regulations. They wired Ottawa asking that the effective date for the changes be postponed until their representations could reach the capital.
22
Presumably they also sought delay in the hopes that they could exert political pressure on the Department.

20 World, April 26, 1898, p. 2; News-Advertiser, April 27, p. 3; Columbian, April 29, p. 3.

21 Columbian, June 7, 1898, p. 1.

22 World, April 27, 1898, p. 5.

Besides the protest, the meeting of canners produced a long-term result, for the large and more than usually representative gathering decided to set up a formal and permanent association to replace the existing informal and partial means of consultation. Up to this point, a Canners' Association is mentioned from time to time in the newspapers, but it seems to have been an ad hoc grouping²³ whose existence a leading canner could refuse to recognize. By 1898, the association was linked with, but not part of, the Vancouver Board of Trade to which many canners belonged. The Board also had a fisheries committee made up of canners and agents, as did the British Columbia Board of Trade in Victoria. But now a desire had arisen for something more closely knit. Henry Bell-Irving told a meeting at which the idea was put forward that the canners were being ignored by the Department of Marine and Fisheries and that a new type of organization would command more respect in Ottawa. After some discussion, a motion creating an organization, tentatively called the "British Columbia Salmon Packers Association," was endorsed and committees made up of three representatives each from Vancouver, Victoria and New Westminster, were set up to draft the necessary²⁴ constitution and by-laws. This organization was undoubtedly given impetus in its formative months by the proclamation in August, 1898,

23 World, Dec. 4, 1896, p. 8.

24 Ibid., April 26, 1898, p. 2; News-Advertiser, April 27, p. 3; Columbian, April 29, p. 3.

of a number of amendments to the fishery regulations to come into
25
effect in the next season.

The canners had succeeded in having the government delay
26
any change in the regulations until after the season of 1898. The
department had also decided that a complete revision of the existing
27
regulations would have to wait. But changes had been made in a
number of the most contentious clauses in the regulations: the
qualifications of license holders and the method by which appli-
cations were to be made. The amendments called for licenses to be
restricted to British subjects resident in Canada, who were bona
fide fishermen. Each applicant for a license was required, no
later than April 30, to enter personally his name and address in a
register to be kept by local fishery officers. When actually
taking out his license, he had to show a receipt for payment of
his provincial poll tax for the preceding year. One license was
to be given to each person who was thus qualified. Canneries were
to get only 10 licenses instead of 20 as before, and these were
specifically restricted to only one fisherman, native Indian or
British subject, whose name was to go on the license. Individual
licenses were to be non-transferable and cannery licenses were to

25 Canada, Privy Council, "Order in Council, August 3, 1898 [Amend-
ment to Fishery Regulations for the Province of British Columbia] ,"
Canada Gazette, vol. 32 (August 13, 1898), pp. 280-1.

26 Colonist, June 9, 1898, p. 2.

27 Canada, S.P., 1900, no. 11a, p. xv.

be cancelled if the cannery failed to operate. For the first time a permit was required for boat-pullers; these men did not have to be British subjects but they had to register under the same conditions as fishermen. The remaining amendments dealt in detail with the marking of boats and nets and with penalties for violations.²⁸

The regulations, as amended, conceded to the fishermen all the changes for which they had been agitating, except the complete elimination of cannery licenses. In the political struggle over regulations, the fishermen had worsted the canners, partly because in this fight they had found friends in the government. Of this they were immediately reminded. When the draft of the regulations was released, the New Westminster Columbian, a friend of the Liberal government, said "complete protection for the fishermen and boat-pullers is aimed at," and it was quick to claim the credit for this achievement for the local Liberal Member of Parliament. Morrison, it said, had fought hard for the fishermen and had been supported by Professor Prince who had been much impressed by the fishermen's demands during his visit to the Fraser in 1897.²⁹ The Toronto Monetary Times also attributed the enactment of the regulations to "the exercise of political influence on the part of the fishermen."³⁰

²⁸ Canada Gazette, vol. 32 (August 13, 1898), pp. 280-1.

²⁹ April 16, 1898, p. 1.

³⁰ Cited in Colonist, Feb. 4, 1899, p. 4.

In this battle for political influence the canners had suffered a defeat. Partly because they were more or less satisfied with the status-quo, they had not campaigned as vigorously as the fishermen, who in the course of several years had hammered out a set of very specific demands. Nor had the canners, as they themselves recognized, been unanimous, or even united, in presenting their demands. Now confronted by what they felt to be a hostile Department of Marine and Fisheries--the Minister was reported by a canner to have said he would have forced the regulations down the throats of the canners except for the coming Quebec meetings of the Joint High Commission on the Atlantic fisheries--the canners³¹ made a vigorous attempt to reverse their unfavorable position. Led by their newly organized association, they appealed directly to the British Columbia Members of Parliament. The British Columbia Members of Parliament and Senators, as well as others directly interested in the industry were invited to a conference.³² Not invited were representatives of the working fishermen--the Association secretary said he could not find any fishermen's organizations of "accredited" fishermen. Two fishermen's representatives, invited to be present by the Rev. G. R. Maxwell, Liberal Member of Parliament for Burrard,

³¹ News-Advertiser, Aug. 18, 1898, p. 10; for the Joint High Commission, see C. C. Tansill, Canadian-American Relations, 1875-1911, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1943, p. 88.

³² Among those invited were the local managers of the Bank of Montreal, Bank of British North America and Merchants Bank of Halifax, an indication of the increased importance of banks in financing the industry. See p. 38 above [Chap. I] .

were there, however. One was David Main; the other was Alderman Alex. Bruce of the City of Vancouver, who had been brought up a fisherman though he no longer worked at the trade. Both had been on the delegation to the Minister the previous fall. Also present was J. H. Watson, then president of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council.

The conference in the main reiterated the canners' previous objections to the amendments. Fire was concentrated on the proposals for registration, for permits for boat-pullers and for the showing of tax receipts. Alderman Bruce repeated the fishermen's contention that the canners should receive no licenses of their own, but he conceded that several features of the regulations, such as the requirement for tax receipts, might be reconsidered. Maxwell, who came under heavy attack both from canners and from Conservative Members of Parliament, complained of conflicting representations. He got the conference to appoint a joint committee of fishermen's representatives and canners to work out proposals for amendments which would be agreeable to both groups. The committee, consisting of Bruce, Main, Watson, and of three canners (Bell-Irving, G.I. Wilson and P. Evans) with Campbell Sweeny, manager of the Bank of Montreal, as chairman, went to work at once.

33 World, Oct. 20, 1898, pp. 7-8; News-Advertiser, Oct. 21, p. 5; Vancouver Province (hereafter cited as Province), Oct. 21, p. 7.

Even though this committee had not been of their seeking, it offered great opportunities to the canners. Joint proposals from the committee could give the canners the appearance of having the backing of all sections of the industry, and would, at least, partially neutralize the objections of any fishermen who did not agree with whatever the committee decided. For Bruce, Main and Watson, on the other hand, there were corresponding dangers; they did not really speak for any organization, and could easily be repudiated and discredited by the fishermen if they appeared to take the canners' part. On most points, however, the differences were not so great that a common position could not be found. In fact, such was the progress of the committee that after two sessions it had reached agreement on every point except that of cannery licenses. The canners were not prepared to agree to any reduction from current figure of 20 licenses, although the representatives of the fishermen were prepared to agree to all other recommendations, on condition that the canners would accept 10 as the number of licenses. This marked a concession on their part, possibly dangerous to them personally, as the fishermen had been firm in demanding that cannery licenses be not merely reduced but eliminated.³⁴

On this rock the joint committee^L foundered. The canners held a meeting of their own which refused to budge from the figure of 20. At the third meeting of the committee, Bruce withdrew, saying

³⁴ Province, Oct. 27, 1898, p. 2; Colonist, Nov. 22, p. 4.

that the fishermen should meet and elect delegates, otherwise there would always be doubt about his position. The canners' representatives then tried to get the other two representatives to agree to submit the committee's decisions to Ottawa, including the agreed points and a statement of differences on the remaining point. This Watson and Main refused to agree to, and the committee broke up in a public exchange of charges and counter-charges.³⁵ The canners' representatives reported back to a full meeting of their Association, which endorsed their refusal to consider less than 20 licenses. At the same meeting, the British Columbia Salmon Packers' Association was confirmed as a permanent organization, and authorized to present the canners' claims at Ottawa.³⁶

Presumably both sides continued to press their cases with the authorities, although actually we know only that the canners did forward the results of the joint committee's decision, including the disputed point about cannery licenses, to Ottawa.³⁷ Meanwhile, a drum-fire in the press charged that the new regulations were "Killing An Industry," and repeated the canners' lament that the industry was being "legislated out of existence" to the advantage of salmon packers on Puget Sound.³⁸

35 Province, Nov. 11, 1898, p. 6 (letter by J. H. Watson), Nov. 15, p. 3 (reply by W. D. Burdis).

36 Colonist, Nov. 16, 1898, p. 6; Province, Nov. 16, p. 7.

37 World, April 11, 1899, p. 7.

38 Colonist, Dec. 29, 1898, p. 1; also New York Fishing Gazette (hereafter cited as Fishing Gazette), Jan. 7, 1899, p. 21; Colonist, Feb. 1, p. 1.

January 1, 1899, the date on which the registry requirements were to come into effect, came and went, but still the industry was not certain that it would have to operate under the new rules in the coming season. An indication that the Department had had second thoughts about their efficacy can be seen in a wire from the deputy minister to the secretary of the Salmon Packers' Association: "The Department has received such various representations respecting regulations that an early decision will be given."³⁹ The Rev. G. R. Maxwell said that the department was prepared to suspend the regulations entirely and modify them to meet the canners' wishes except⁴⁰ in the matter of the 10 licenses.

When the further amendments were promulgated by Order-in-Council on April 1, 1899, major revisions were incorporated. The requirement that an applicant be a bona fide fisherman was dropped. The registration procedure was altered: the final date for registration was to be June 30, rather than April 30; tax receipts did not have to be produced; and native Indians were exempted from registration. Except for a few technical changes, the government stood firm on the questions of cannery licenses, on the remaining stipulations regarding fishermen and boat-pullers, and on the⁴¹ penalties prescribed.

39 Colonist, March 7, 1899, p. 1.

40 Ibid., Feb. 17, 1899, p. 2.

41 Canada, Privy Council, "Order-in-Council, April 1, 1899 [Amendment to Fishery Regulations for the Province of British Columbia] ,"
Canada Gazette, vol. 32 (April 1, 1899), pp. 1884-5.

The cannerymen greeted the latest changes with the ritual protests; the regulations were "very little better," Henry O. Bell-Irving told the annual meeting of the Salmon Packers' Association. The association passed a motion of "regret" that the changes had not conformed more closely to the suggestions of the ill-fated joint committee, and served notice of its intention to agitate for amendment of the objectionable clauses.⁴²

As the sockeye season of 1899 drew nearer, dire predictions about the condition of the industry continued. Fear was expressed that sufficient labor would not be available to man the boats.⁴³ A special fisheries official was sent out from Ottawa to make on-the-spot changes in the new regulations if they were needed.⁴⁴ Whatever labor shortage might have existed was quickly eased by his extension of the registration period until July 15.⁴⁵ By the time the fishing season opened the number of licenses issued was higher than in any previous year.⁴⁶ The grumbles about shortage of labor changed to grumbles about the shortage of fish, for the season started very slowly. By the time it was over, however, the pack was

⁴² World, April 11, 1899, p. 7.

⁴³ Colonist, May 4, 1899, p. 2; May 14, p. 1; Fishing Gazette, July 8, p. 419.

⁴⁴ Canada, S.P., 1900, no. 11a, p. xv.

⁴⁵ Columbian, July 10, 1899, p. 4.

⁴⁶ See Table V (Gillnet Licenses), p. 48 above.

bigger than any other year to that date, except the banner year of 1897.⁴⁷ This big catch seems to have reconciled the canners to a certain extent to the alterations in the regulations.

Once the canners had organized a tightly-knit association that gave them the potential power of wielding all their strength as a unit, the fishermen in self-defence had sooner or later to follow suit. The actual decision to organize seems to have been triggered off by reports throughout the fall of 1899 of various attempts to create a combine among the canners.⁴⁸ Combines, or projected combines, among canners were not new. They had been tried from time to time in preceding years, and were mostly agreements designed to keep up the selling price of canned salmon by orderly disposition of the pack. The most recent one had operated to sell the 1898 pack in the United Kingdom.⁴⁹ Attempts had also been made in 1898 to organize another type of combine to limit production, but it had failed because the smaller operators would not agree to join.⁵⁰ This second type was important to the canners because the opening price for selling the pack of any season was based on total pack figures for all Pacific Coast salmon-canning areas from Alaska

⁴⁷ See Table I (Canneries and Pack), p. 2 above.

⁴⁸ Colonist, Sept. 8, 1899, p. 8; Nov. 24, p. 8; News-Advertiser, Nov. 29, p. 3; Nov. 30, p. 5; Province, Nov. 30, p. 8.

⁴⁹ British Columbia Board of Trade (Victoria), Annual Report, 1898, p. 17.

⁵⁰ Colonist, July 9, 1898, p. 1.

to California--the smaller the pack, the higher the opening price. This kind of combine was also of direct concern to the fishermen since any agreement to limit the pack could affect fish prices.

What was new about the combine that was finally decided upon late in 1899 was that it not only proposed to control the selling prices of the finished product, but also to limit production. Furthermore when details were published, it became clear that it proposed to control prices of raw materials--fixing an industry-wide maximum season's price to the fishermen.⁵¹ The shock waves from this revolutionary plan rolled through the industry. The first hint of this new development was followed by the organization of a union in New Westminster; the revelation of the complete scheme produced a second union in Vancouver.

The organization of the first of the two unions, that in New Westminster, followed too closely on the announcement of the canners' plans to be entirely attributable to that news. But, we have seen, a self-conscious and articulate group of fishermen had grown up in that city, and this group undoubtedly provided the core of the new union. Its form was perhaps determined by outside intervention--J. H. Watson, a member of the joint committee of 1898, and of the organization committee of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, reported that he had journeyed to New Westminster and organized the union. It was chartered by the Canadian central labor

⁵¹ Province, Jan. 25, 1900, p. 1.

body, the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, and it hoped to enroll all fishermen on the British Columbia coast, starting with a membership of 200 in the New Westminster area.⁵²

The union in Vancouver can be more directly traced to the reaction to the announcement of the details of the canners' combine. The knowledge that the combine would set a maximum price for fish for the coming season, enforce heavy penalties on canners who paid more, and fix the size of the pack for each cannery, could not have been reassuring to the fishermen. Even the Province, no friend of labor, wondered editorially whether the combine could achieve its purpose without "inflicting hardship on the fishermen."⁵³ A spokesman for the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council commenting that the fishermen had yet to be heard from, added that the Council would make sure⁵⁴ they were heard. The promised voice for the fishermen soon appeared. In March a second union of fishermen was organized in Vancouver, again by J. H. Watson. This union received its charter⁵⁵ directly from the American Federation of Labor.

The struggle over fishery regulations, because it heightened in both canners and fishermen an awareness of their respective

52 Province, Dec. 9, 1899, p. 12.

53 Ibid., Jan. 26, 1900, p. 4.

54 Ibid., Jan. 27, 1900, p. 1.

55 Ibid., March 17, 1900, p. 4; World, March 17, p. 6.

interests, had polarized them into opposing groups. On the employers' side, the end product was an association embracing almost every canner and wielding considerable power over its members. On the fishermen's side, the beginnings of organization appear in reaction to developments among the canners. Though the struggle over regulations had intensified group consciousness of both canners and fishermen, the actual creation of the opposing organizations was due largely to the perennial problem of fish prices. Each group was driven to organize in order to influence fish prices in its own favor. Thus, with the emergence of the new canners' association and the fishermen's unions, the conflict shifted from the political arena to the field of industrial relations, from lobbying for changes in regulations to negotiations over the price of salmon.

Once they had organized, both sides rushed to complete their dispositions before the opening of the sockeye season and the almost certain struggle over sockeye prices. The canners, with past experience in business organization and with past efforts in co-operation to build on, were able to carry through their plans with comparative ease, while the fishermen faced a multitude of unfamiliar problems that had to be solved with desperate speed by the untried unions and their inexperienced leaders.

In the first flush of the public announcement, it had been expected that the canners' combine would include all canneries on the⁵⁴ Fraser River. But once the Fraser River Canners' Association was

⁵⁴ Province, Jan. 25, 1900, p. 1; Feb. 12, p. 8.

formally launched, three cannery operators hesitated to join. After several weeks of waiting, the Association decided to implement without⁵⁵ them its plans for controlling production and prices. A committee was formed to assign to each participating cannery, on the basis of capacity and past performance, a quota for the 1900 season's pack. This committee was also to set the price to be paid to fishermen for sockeye in the 1900 season, but its deliberations in this respect were not made public. Only in the later attempts of the fishermen to negotiate prices with the canners was any light shed on its decisions. In March members of the committee began to visit in⁵⁶ turn all the canneries on the river.

By the end of March, the fishermen had only just completed the formation of their two separate unions in New Westminster and Vancouver. Everything else remained to be done. They had to create some form of joint direction which would permit the two unions to operate together. They had to recruit to their ranks the majority of fishermen, still outside the unions. They had to make a crucial decision about the extent of co-operation with the Japanese and Indian fishermen. Finally they had to formulate the policy of the unions on sockeye prices.

The way these problems were handled was influenced by the kind of leadership that came to the fore in the fishermen's unions.

55 Province, Feb. 19, 1900, p. 5; March 2, p. 7.

56 Columbian, March 13, 1900, p. 1; Province, March 16, p. 5.

The impulse to create a union came in the first place from the fishermen themselves, but in the formation of both unions they were dependent on the skill and experience of an outside organizer, Joseph H. Watson, representing the trade unions of Vancouver. Watson was a member of the organization committee of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, and a past president of that body.⁵⁷ After the unions had been organized, he continued to play a part in their affairs, serving as secretary of the Vancouver union.⁵⁸ Watson had been a delegate to the founding convention of the British Columbia Liberal Association in New Westminster in 1897,⁵⁹ and through the agency of the Reverend G. R. Maxwell, Liberal Member of Parliament for Burrard, he had in 1898⁶⁰ got an appointment to the customs service in Vancouver. This post, far from cutting him off from the trade union movement, gave him an opportunity of doing organizing work. By 1900, Watson, like the majority of delegates to the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, was active in promoting independent labor candidates⁶¹ for election to the provincial legislature.

Though Watson continued to present the fishermen's position to the public, the leadership of the Vancouver union soon passed into

57 News-Advertiser, Nov. 11, 1899, p. 5; see p. 87 above.

58 Fishing Gazette, April 7, 1900, p. 210.

59 Columbian, Oct. 13, 1897, p. 4.

60 World, Nov. 16, 1898, p. 7.

61 Vancouver Independent (hereafter cited as Independent), May 19, 1900, p. 1.

more radical hands. The vice-president of the union was Frank Rogers, a one-time seaman who was working as a longshoreman. He was prominent in Socialist activities in Vancouver, and one of the leading figures in a dissident group in the Socialist Labor Party section in the city. A few weeks after the formation of the fishermen's union, this group broke away from the Socialist Labor Party and emerged as the United Socialist Labor Party of British Columbia.⁶² In spite of the polemics (and fisticuffs!) that marked the clash of this splinter group with the orthodox Socialist Labor Party members, the causes of the split are not entirely clear. The point at issue, however, seems to have been the policy of the party concerning participation in trade unions other than its own Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance, a "dual union" which at this time, after prolonged consideration, was finally denied membership in the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council.⁶³ The likeliest explanation of the defection of Rogers and Will MacClain, another leader of the United Socialist Labor Party, lies in their active role in the Trades and Labor Council, Rogers in the longshoremen's and fishermen's unions and MacClain in the machinists' union. They apparently left the Socialist Labor Party rather than cut themselves off from the mainstream of the trade union movement by confining their activities

⁶² British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Journals (hereafter cited as B.C., Journals), 1900, p. clxxv.

⁶³ Province, April 25, 1900, p. 1.

⁶⁴ News-Advertiser, Nov. 26, 1899, p. 3; Independent, April 21, 1900, p. 1.

to the largely ineffectual Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance.

Whatever the reasons for Rogers leaving the Socialist Labor Party, the fishermen's unions faced its problems largely under his leadership and under the influence of his militant beliefs.

Rogers became increasingly prominent in the union, although as he later candidly confessed, he had never fished in his life.⁶⁵ By the time of the strike he was the union's acknowledged leader.

The first problem to be taken up, the co-ordination of the two separate unions, was tackled by a delegation from the Vancouver union to New Westminster. This delegation, of which Rogers was a member, was given extensive powers to act, in order to effect a speedy decision. One difficulty was that the Vancouver union was chartered by the American Federation of Labor, while the New Westminster union had its charter from the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada.⁶⁶ This difference was resolved by agreement to unite under a Trades and Labor Congress charter, but until this could be done, a central board was set up with Rogers as secretary.⁶⁷ This board was apparently somewhat limited in its directing role since during negotiations the New Westminster union was still able to send its own delegation to interview the Cannery Association.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ B.C., Journals, 1900, p. clxxv.

⁶⁶ Independent, April 21, 1900, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Ibid., June 23, 1900, p. 2.

⁶⁸ B.C., Journals, p. clxxv.

Thus the gap between Vancouver and New Westminster, which corresponded roughly to the difference between men who fished only in the summer for the sockeye and those who also fished in spring and fall for chinook and coho, was not entirely closed and was to widen again during the stresses of the strike.

The decision to enroll in the one union all fishermen, whether white, Japanese, or Indian, was an emotionally-charged one. As we have seen, the group represented in the New Westminster union had in the past based most of its efforts on attempting to restrict its competitors, especially among the Japanese fishermen. Now, quite understandably, it hesitated to open ⁶⁹ the organization to Japanese and Indians. In contrast, the Vancouver union had invited all fishermen to its very first organizing meeting and some ⁷⁰ Japanese and Indians had attended. At that meeting it passed a resolution in favor of enrolling all fishermen irrespective of ethnic ⁷¹ origins.

Relations with the Japanese fishermen offered the greatest challenge. Because of their numbers--they held approximately half ⁷² the fishing licenses issued for the Fraser River in 1899 --their participation was essential to any successful price negotiations

⁶⁹ Independent, June 23, 1900, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Province, March 2, 1900, p. 5; March 17, p. 4.

⁷¹ World, July 11, 1900, p. 3 (letter from J. H. Watson).

⁷² See Table V, p. 48 above.

by fishermen, but great difficulties stood in the way of such participation. To the barriers of language and custom had been added the tension generated by past campaigns among white fishermen against Japanese immigration in general and the entry of the Japanese into the fishing industry in particular. The approach of the fishermen's unions to the problem also took place against a background of increased agitation among trade unionists against

⁷³ Japanese immigration. In the spring of 1900, something like a panic developed over the sudden increase in the number of Japanese immigrants--in April it was reported that 7,036 had entered Canada since January.

⁷⁴ Trade unionists suspected that the recent visit of canneryman Frank Burnett to Japan had something to do with this increase in numbers.

⁷⁵ Protests against naturalization procedures and the methods of registering Japanese for fishing licenses increased in volume, Rogers himself making a public protest on behalf of the fishermen's union against license procedures in

⁷⁶ Vancouver. In this atmosphere the Japanese fishermen could hardly be expected to take at face value protestations of goodwill by the whites who were offering membership in the new unions.

73 The Vancouver labor weekly, the Independent, ran editorials against Chinese and Japanese immigration. (April 21, 1900, p. 2; May 12, 1900, p. 2). The Vancouver Trades and Labor Council added a demand for "total abolition of Chinese and Japanese immigration" to its platform. (Ibid., May 19, 1900, p. 1).

74 Ibid., April 28, 1900, p. 6.

75 Ibid., May 19, 1900, p. 1.

76 Province, June 23, 1900, p. 5.

Undaunted by these considerations, Rogers personally set about the organization of the Japanese fishermen. The effort at first seemed to have the support of the Japanese consul, who was reported to be anxious to have all his countrymen join the union.⁷⁷ Rogers made at least one trip, with an interpreter, to talk to Japanese fishermen in Steveston,⁷⁸ and the union held a meeting of the Japanese "bosses" from the canneries to explain its purposes.⁷⁹ Somewhere along the way the attempt must have failed for there is no evidence that any Japanese joined either union. Probably the language difficulty was one reason. Perhaps the past and current propaganda against Japanese made the Japanese fishermen fearful of an organization dominated by whites. Then, too, the canners would not have welcomed this proposed accession to union strength and we have no way of knowing what influence they had in the decision of the Japanese not to join the fishermen's unions.

When the Japanese did act, the organization they set up was not a union, even though in the newspapers' accounts of the period it is usually referred to as the Japanese union. In actual fact, its name was the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society, and as its title indicates it was a cultural and welfare group. Among⁸⁰

77 World, March 17, 1900, p. 6.

78 Independent, April 28, 1900, p. 5.

79 Ibid., May 12, 1900, p. 6.

80 B.C. Reg. of Cos., 77 (Soc.) [office files] .

its objects were the building of a hospital and a school for Japanese⁸¹ at Steveston. Work on the hospital proceeded at once.

The Society seemed unlikely to take a strong stand on behalf of the economic, as distinct from the cultural and welfare, interests of its fishermen members. It was pledged to "maintain and⁸² foster a good understanding between Japanese and cannerymen," and it did not confine itself only to those who would be normally eligible for membership in a union. One of the three signatories of the application to register as a benevolent society, Kamekich Oki, was a labor contractor or "boss" at the Lighthouse cannery in⁸³ Steveston. This inclusion of members of differing economic and social levels in one organization is fairly typical of ethnic group organizations. It can be seen today in the fishing industry in the⁸⁴ Native Brotherhood of British Columbia. Such an all-inclusive membership tends to prevent the organization from functioning in the economic interests of its members in the way a union functions and this seems to have been true of the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society.

By June, 1900, therefore, there had been formed among canners and fishermen all the organizations--the Fraser River

81 Province, June 21, 1900, p. 2.

82 B.C. Reg. of Cos., 77 (Soc.) [office files] .

83 World, July 17, 1900, p. 1; Province, July 18, p. 3.

84 Gladstone, "Native Indians and the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," CJEPS, vol. 19 (February 1953), pp. 32-3.

Canners' Association, the Fishermen's unions, and the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society--that were to take part in the dispute during the sockeye season. Once this process had been completed, the stage was set, for each of the contending groups was now ready to make its own decision regarding price levels for the coming season and to negotiate with the other groups for an agreement on prices.

CHAPTER IV

THE 1900 STRIKE--PHASE ONE

As the sockeye season approached and both fishermen and canners clarified their positions on price levels, a wide gap stood revealed between the union on one side and the canners' combine on the other. So far apart were they that one of them would have virtually to capitulate to the other. Since each side had worked hard during the past six months to improve its bargaining strength, neither was likely to be in a mood to give in easily. The likelihood of a prolonged struggle, therefore, overshadowed all other prospects for the canning season.

On the fishermen's side, the Japanese led the way in fixing their price demands for the 1900 season. According to J. H. Watson, the fishermen's union of Vancouver, which had made repeated attempts through prominent Japanese to contact the Japanese fishermen, was finally, in mid-June, called by the Japanese fishing "bosses" to a meeting at Steveston and introduced to the officers of a Japanese union--a "union" which within the next week was registered as the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society. At this meeting, the white fishermen were told that the Japanese had already decided on a price of not less than 25 cents a fish.¹ Immediately after the meeting, a joint public appeal, signed by three representatives of

1 World, July 11, 1900, p. 3.

the Vancouver fishermen and the president, vice-president and secretary of the Japanese organization, noted that the Japanese group already had a membership of 1,250, and called on "all whites (or any other color)" to join what the document called the British Columbia Fishermen's Union. At the same time, it announced a resolution of the joint meeting in favor of a price throughout² the season of 25 cents a fish.

Later, in the heat of feeling against the Japanese for having broken with the other fishermen during the strike and having accepted a price lower than 25 cents, Watson joined others in arguing that the 25-cent figure had first been set by the Japanese and that the other fishermen had merely followed the Japanese lead. This explanation seems rather too simple, for in an attempt to score off the Japanese, it ignores other reasons that pre-disposed the fishermen to ask for 25 cents. In the first place, 25 cents had been the opening price in the 1899 season and had been maintained throughout, with only a brief slump to 15 cents and with several companies paying³ prices higher than 25 cents. The season of 1900 was likewise expected to be a small year, so a price equal to that of the past season would not appear excessive to the fishermen. Another consideration in the fishermen's minds was the prices reported as being paid on the Columbia River and in Puget Sound. Fishermen from the Columbia

² News-Advertiser, June 21, 1900, p. 6.

³ See Chapter II, pp. 69-70 above.

River who came to fish on the Fraser, for instance, reported that seven cents a pound was being paid there for the chinook, a larger salmon than the sockeye. Applying that rate to the sockeye, the price per fish would be 35 cents and up.⁴ A more directly comparable situation was that on Puget Sound where sockeye were said to be fetching 25 cents a fish.⁵ Another reason for the fishermen to demand a higher price was that the steadily increasing number of boats cut the number of salmon caught per boat and thus produced smaller returns to the individual fisherman. The fishermen based part of their argument for 25 cents a fish on an average catch for the season of 1,000 fish per fisherman, a figure derived from their experience of the past season.⁶ Their spokesmen pointed up the dilemma of fishermen by saying that in past years they could afford to accept a lower price because there had been fewer fishermen and consequently larger catches per man.⁷

Moved by all these reasons, the fishermen's unions agreed with the Japanese to hold out for 25 cents a fish. Separate meetings

⁴ Prices on the Columbia River advanced during the season from five cents to seven and one-half cents a pound for fish for the canneries and to eight cents for cold storage fish. (Fishing Gazette, April 14, 1900, p. 238; May 26, p. 335; July 21, p. 453).

⁵ World, July 10, 1900, p. 2.

⁶ Rounsefell and Kelez show an average catch of 943 fish, using their "unit of effort" concept (See Table VI, p. 75 above). Statistics presented to the Royal Commission on British Columbia Fisheries, 1905-07, show a somewhat higher average catch, approximately 1,675 fish (Report and Recommendations, Ottawa, 1908, p. 23).

⁷ Columbian, July 27, 1900, p. 1; Independent, July 28, p. 1 (letter by J. H. Watson).

of the Japanese union at Steveston, and the fishermen's unions in Vancouver and New Westminster, ratified the decisions on Saturday, June 30, just prior to the opening of the sockeye season.⁸

While the decisions by the fishermen on their price demands are easy to follow because they were made in public, parallel decisions on the part of the canners are more difficult to unravel because they were made in private. The announced intention of the combine was to set a price to the fishermen as high as was consistent with profitable operation, a committee being delegated to arrive at the actual figure.⁹ Though hailed by the press as a new departure, this intention was not incompatible with the price pattern of previous years, when the announced opening price was varied during the season according to the supply of fish.¹⁰ Nothing indicated that a price fixed for the whole season was contemplated. What primarily concerned the canners was the elimination of losses from mid-season price boosts caused by competitive bidding for fish among the canners. A solution to this problem would be, not a fixed price, but a maximum price, which would still leave them free to lower prices in a temporary glut as had been the custom in previous years.

For a number of reasons, the canners were likely to delay as long as they could the announcement of any such maximum price.

⁸ World, July 3, 1900, p. 3.

⁹ Province, Jan. 25, 1900, p. 1.

¹⁰ See Chapter II, pp. 61-70 above.

Since their other costs were fairly predictable, profit margins depended on the ratio between the cost of the raw fish and the selling price of the canned product. Advance orders for canned salmon, always subject to confirmation on publication of the season's opening price for the canned product, were influenced by opening prices in other salmon-producing areas, especially Alaska and Puget Sound,¹¹ which also canned sockeye salmon. Prudence, then, induced the canners to wait as long as possible so the price of raw fish could be set in light of the latest market conditions for the canned product.

No price for sockeye appears to have been arrived at prior to the season's opening on July 1. Some time before June 24 when the Association's secretary met a delegation of fishermen, the canners' association did pass a price resolution, but only in the most general terms, reserving its right to fix the price of fish¹² from time to time as it saw fit. This resolution is added evidence that no fixed season's price was contemplated, and that prices were to be handled as they had been in previous years. It also underlines the refusal of the canners to make any concessions to meet the changed circumstances brought about by the formation of unions. In effect, the canners rejected the main principles underlying the union demands: that prices be the subject of negotiations between

¹¹ For discussion of the importance of opening prices in the industry's sales pattern, see Cobb, Pacific Salmon Fisheries, pp. 584-6.

¹² News-Advertiser, July 12, 1900, p. 3.

canners and fishermen and that one price be paid throughout the season.

This attitude makes it unlikely that the canners considered putting forward their own price proposals in answer to the unions' demands, though during the strike one canner blamed the unions' early announcement of its demands for forestalling a voluntary increase in prices by the canners.¹³ In any case, an early announcement, especially when prices had to be cut, had many disadvantages for the canners. A low opening price would discourage the flow of seasonal labor--better to wait until the men had arrived on the river. A premature release of price figures could help the union fishermen in their organizing drive; in a couple of the past years, disputes at the beginning of the season had been touched off by the posting of price cuts too far ahead of the heavy run.¹⁴ The canners probably also thought, again in the light of past experience, that the fishermen would be unable to hold out for long; previous seasons had seen similar stands by fishermen which had not lasted beyond the appearance of the sockeye in numbers.

The Fraser River Canners' Association, therefore, watched the approach of the season with apparent unconcern. They published nothing about the season's prices and made no counter-moves that would appear to recognize the enrollment of substantial numbers of

13 Columbian, July 11, 1900, p. 3.

14 See Chapter II, pp. 52, 65, 69 above.

fishermen in organizations which claimed to speak on their behalf.

The fishermen did not begin to fish when the sockeye season opened on July 1, and were therefore technically on strike. But, as the fish had not begun to run and the heavy part of the run was not expected until mid-July or later, the two sides had an interval in which differences could be settled without any significant cut in the season's pack. In this situation, the unions moved first. They asked the Cannerymen's Association to meet delegations which had been appointed by the June 30 meetings of fishermen's unions. At a July 3 meeting with the cannerymen's executive committee, the fishermen explained their stand and asked the Association to give them a verdict on their demands. The executive promised to call a meeting¹⁵ at which the cannery owners would consider the unions' requests.

At this point, a decision by the cannerymen on a maximum season's price was revealed. Even before the meeting of the full association, the owner "of one of the largest canneries on the Fraser" was quoted as saying that the maximum price would be 20 cents and that this maximum would be enforced by heavy bonds already put up¹⁶ by all the cannerymen. A canneryman not in the combine denied that he was paying 25 cents and indicated that he understood 20 cents¹⁷ to be the combine's price. Presumably, this maximum had been set

15 World, July 4, 1900, p. 8.

16 Ibid., July 3, 1900, p. 3.

17 Ibid., July 4, 1900, p. 8.

by the executive prior to the July 3 meeting with the fishermen's delegation, and was probably ratified within a few days of that date by the meeting of cannery owners, a meeting which, as reported by another canneryman, was only a formality because 20 cents had already¹⁸ been decided on.

An appreciation of the exact nature of the decision involving the 20-cent figure is crucial to an understanding of the future course of negotiations. Was this an offer to the fishermen for 20 cents a fish throughout the season? On the contrary, both canners and fishermen recognized this figure as the traditional opening price, in which reduction could be made at any time. Previous seasons were replete with examples of a swift cut in the opening price as soon as the fish began to run heavily. In 1900, individual canners made it plain in discussing the figure, that it was not an offer to pay 20 cents for the season. C. S. Windsor of Malcolm and Windsor told a reporter that the Association would, if possible, pay 20 cents throughout the whole season but would not¹⁹ make any agreement to that effect. One or two canners were, indeed, reported to be in favor of paying 20 cents to the end of²⁰ the season but the majority would not agree to this. On the fishermen's side the 20 cents was also recognized for what it was--

¹⁸ World, July 4, 1900, p. 8.

¹⁹ News-Advertiser, July 12, 1900, p. 3.

²⁰ World, July 10, 1900, p. 2.

the usual opening price. Some fishermen disagreed with the unions' methods--they felt the strike should be delayed until the 20-cent opening price was actually reduced.²¹ Since the crux of the unions' demands was for one price throughout the season, the majority naturally declined to follow this course and in answer to the canners simply repeated their demands for 25 cents. The canners reacted with the irritation of men who had followed a long-standing arrangement only to see it rejected out of hand. From their point of view, the only new element in the situation was not the level of prices, but the restraining of price competition among themselves. From the unions' point of view, the new element was the demand for one price through the season. With this the canners were not prepared to cope. By the opening of the second week of the season, the canners had made their decision for the time being and began to offer²² 20 cents for the few fish being taken.

The next move was up to the fishermen, who had to cut off the supply of fish if they wanted to bring the canners again to the bargaining table. During the weekend, the unions prepared to enforce a general stoppage along the river. On Saturday, July 7, two large meetings were held, one at Steveston in the afternoon and one at Eburne on the North Arm in the evening. The Steveston meeting was reported to have been attended by about 700 men, about one-third of the fishermen then in Steveston, and the Eburne meeting by from

21 News-Advertiser, July 12, 1900, p. 3.

22 Columbian, July 12, 1900, p. 4.

200 to 300. These were propaganda meetings to state the fishermen's case and to show that the unions had the backing of the trade union movement. They were addressed by labor leaders from Vancouver, including Joseph Dixon and Francis Williams, the Independent Labor candidates in the June provincial election, and Will MacClain, the candidate of the United Socialist Labor Party.²³ Further recruiting for the union continued—at Eburne, a group of 125 fishermen were²⁴ enrolled in the union after the meeting.

During this weekend the first stresses began to appear among the disparate group of fishermen. The Indians lined up on the side of the strikers, but one of their chiefs warned the whites against deserting the Indians to go back to work as had happened, he claimed, in the strike of 1893. The Japanese did not participate in the meetings. With some difficulty, apparently, the secretary of the Japanese union was brought to the Steveston meeting to repeat his pledge that the Japanese would stay out for the 25 cents²⁵ demanded.

At the end of the weekly close time on Sunday, July 8, however, a large group of Japanese did go out to fish--nearly²⁶ 1,000 boats were said to be fishing. Since the action suggested

²³ World, July 9, 1900, p. 3.

²⁴ Province, July 9, 1900, p. 4.

²⁵ World, July 9, 1900, p. 3. The tone of the newspaper reports was uniformly hostile to the Japanese and reflected the belief that the Japanese would break the strike. Larid reports circulated about the Japanese all being armed. These reports Rogers investigated personally and pronounced a "canard" (Province, July 6, 1900, p. 5).

²⁶ World, July 9, 1900, p. 3.

either that the Japanese union had not been able to gain the support of its fellow countrymen or that it was not completely straight-forward in its claim to support the strike, the union fishermen were confronted with a crisis. If the strikers were to bring pressure to bear on the canners, this fishing had to be stopped. But it was not in any panic that the union men began a campaign to inform both union and non-union fishermen about the strike and to persuade them not to fish for less than the union's demands. Aside from the obvious case of the Japanese, Rogers and other union spokesmen stressed that lack of communication prevented many fishermen scattered along the river from knowing about the strike. A system of union patrol boats began on Monday and the boats, each with its red and white flag, and an interpreter, if Japanese were to be interviewed, soon swept the river clean. Some reports indicate that the catch of the offending fishermen was dumped overboard, but no reliable reports appeared of violence being offered to non-strikers. On shore, a procession of strikers, organized at Steveston, paraded in turn to the Japanese bunkhouses at each cannery on the dyke. The strike situation was explained through an interpreter to the head man of each house. By Tuesday evening July 10, Rogers was able to report that the strike was as nearly general as possible.

27 World, July 12, 1900, p. 2.

28 Ibid., July 10, p. 2; July 11, p. 2; Province, July 10, 1900, p. 9.

29 World, July 11, 1900, p. 2.

This bounced the ball right back into the canners' court and the executive of the Association met to consider the changed situation. They were frank to recognize the success of the unions' efforts--as they wired to J. H. Todd and Son, one of their member companies with headquarters in Victoria, no boats were fishing. But this was not reason enough for the Association to prepare to negotiate with the union. Indeed, in the same wire, they specifically reassured Todd's that "the Canners' Association has not recognized the union in any way."³⁰

Apparently the canners were unable to believe that large numbers of fishermen were no longer prepared to accept the old system of fluctuating prices. Their only explanation of the strike, therefore, was that a few "agitators" were preventing the great majority, who were quite willing to fish on the canners' terms, from going out. The canners' policy was consequently directed toward creating the conditions under which this presumably docile majority would start fishing again. To do this they attempted to stop what they considered "intimidation" and what the union probably classified as "persuasion"--that is, the systematic visiting, on the fishing grounds and elsewhere, of all fishermen in an attempt to get them not to fish at less than the union rate. As a first step, the canners had already dusted off the legal phraseology used in 1893; fresh posters soon went up over the name of W. A. Duncan, secretary

30 British Columbia, Sessional Papers (hereafter cited as B.C., S.P.), 1900, p. 1007.

of the Fraser River Cannery Association. Repeating the exact words of the 1893 poster, these offered one hundred dollars' reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone committing a variety of offences, including cutting nets, intimidating non-strikers, or threatening violence.³¹ Protection of the supposedly loyal fishermen was not, however, to be confined to offers of rewards. The cannery executive wired D. M. Eberts, Attorney-General of British Columbia, for police protection. The wire painted a lurid picture of the strike situation; riots and property damage were said to be likely unless there was "immediate and ample" police protection for those fishermen said to be "desirous of pursuing their lawful calling."³² Armed strikers were alleged to be parading in Steveston, an assertion which shows how far the cannery were prepared to stretch the truth to gain their ends for not even the most sensational journalist among those on the scene had reported seeing arms among the strikers. On the contrary, both Vancouver afternoon newspapers emphasized the peaceful and orderly nature of the previous evening's parade in Steveston.³³

Any government numbering in its ranks the Hon. J. H. Turner, former premier and now Minister of Finance, and one of the province's most prominent cannery, might be expected to act quickly when the

31 Province, July 10, 1900, p. 9.

32 B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1005.

33 Province, July 10, 1900, p. 9; World, July 10, 1900, p. 2.

representatives of the canners asked for police help. Chief Constable R. B. Lister of the provincial police at New Westminster was dispatched to Steveston on the same day the wire was received in Victoria. The information in the canners' wire resulted in his being told to keep in touch with the stipendiary magistrate in Vancouver in case the reading of the Riot Act should become necessary.³⁴ Almost as soon as the initial orders had been sent, the unfortunate Chief Constable was bombarded with wires from the Attorney-General's department in Victoria demanding an immediate report. The contrast between the situation outlined in Lister's first reports and the picture drawn by the canners, was a startling one. This kind of contrast was to work against him more than once in the succeeding weeks. "All quiet here at present," reported Lister, who could find only two incidents between strikers and non-strikers, neither of which he witnessed personally. Lister reported his version of the causes of the strike: the Canners' Association had offered the men 20 cents a fish for the whole season and the majority of fishermen were satisfied to go to work at that price. A number of men, however, had been induced to hold out for 25 cents by two "labour agitators by the name of McClain [sic] and Anderson." Lister commenced to hire special constables and to make arrangements with the Canners' Association for four of their cannery tugs to patrol the fishing grounds, each carrying three or four special constables.

³⁴ B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1005.

This "exhibition of authority," he was convinced, would prevent "any serious lawlessness."³⁵

In line with the theory of both cannery and police officials that agitators alone were responsible for the trouble, an attempt was made to remove the union leaders from the scene. Captain J. L. Anderson, who had been elected president of the Vancouver union on its formation, was arrested and charged with intimidation as a result of his activities as a spokesman in a union patrol boat on English Bay. The information was laid by an Indian boy, John Thomas, a boat-puller in his uncle's boat, but the management of the English Bay cannery was evidently behind the arrest since Thomas admitted under cross-examination in court that he had been sent for to sign the information by a Mr. Graham, presumably a cannery employee.³⁶ The charges were dismissed and Anderson later announced he was bringing a damage suit against the cannery company and its manager, J. J. Crane.³⁷ The thinking behind this purely vexatious arrest is revealed in a report by Provincial Constable Colin Campbell who told Eberts that "Anderson is looked on as one of the leaders."³⁸ The other "agitator," Will MacClain, could not

35 B.C., S.P., 1900, pp. 1005-6.

36 World, July 12, 1900, p. 1; Province, July 12, p. 8; Colonist, July 13, p. 6; News-Advertiser, July 14, p. 3.

37 World, July 18, 1900, p. 3.

38 B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1008.

be got at in the same way as Anderson since he was not engaged in patrol work, but he was at this time dismissed by the Canadian Pacific Railway from his employment as a machinist. Although MacClain said confidently that his workmates would strike because of his dismissal, no such action was taken. He then proceeded to devote all his energies to the fishermen's strike.³⁹

Another case involving charges of intimidation against a Chilean fisherman named Williams was thrown out by the presiding magistrates who said they did not have jurisdiction in the case since one of the alleged offences took place outside the three mile limit.⁴⁰ Williams was remanded several times on other charges before the information was withdrawn and the case dropped.⁴¹

Though the efforts of canners and police were singularly unsuccessful in permanently removing the leaders, they did provoke an angry response from the Fishermen's Union and its labor supporters. A meeting in the Labor Hall in Vancouver protested against the use of special constables "to protect the canners' interest," in view of Lister's statements that he expected no trouble. It also charged that Anderson had been arrested "without any reason whatever."

³⁹ Province, July 16, 1900, p. 4. A wire from Lister (dated July 13) would seem to indicate Rogers was also arrested in this round-up of "agitators," but I think the date given is a misprint for July 23, the day before the militia arrived, for which date other sources corroborate Roger's arrest (B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1007).

⁴⁰ World, July 14, 1900, p. 8; B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1008.

⁴¹ B.C., Journals, 1900, p. clxvi.

The fishermen's union denied that it had been responsible for mysterious notices that had appeared around Steveston threatening to shoot anyone who fished for less than the union rate or, at the very least, stove in his boat. Its position was stated as urging "all fishermen to refrain from all intimidation and violence, but to use all lawful means to keep men from fishing under price." Plans were also set in motion for an appeal to public opinion in the form of a procession and meeting in Vancouver on Saturday evening, July 14.⁴²

But the fishermen did not confine themselves to public demonstrations. On the Friday before the procession a meeting was held in Vancouver, apparently with representatives from all localities, at which a committee, consisting of two fishermen from Vancouver, two from New Westminster and one each from the North Arm and Steveston, was set up to meet the canners, if the latter so desired, to negotiate a settlement. Rogers, Watson and MacClain were not on the committee which seems to have been chosen to meet criticisms⁴³ that the leaders of the union were not themselves fishermen.

While these plans for opening negotiations were coming to fruition, the fishermen held a powerful demonstration in Vancouver. Led by the Fort Simpson Indian band in colorful costume and playing catchy tunes, followed by officials of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, a procession of fishermen and their sympathizers

⁴² World, July 12, 1900, p. 1; Independent, July 14, p. 2.

⁴³ Province, July 14, 1900, p. 1.

estimated at about 1,000 persons, paraded through the downtown streets to an open-air evening meeting at the corner of Hastings and Cambie Streets. Here a large crowd was addressed from the steps of the Courthouse by various speakers, including Watson, MacClain, Anderson, Dixon, a Fort Simpson Indian chief and Mr. H. Tribble, a labor leader from Winnipeg. The fishermen's case got a thorough airing, and though the speeches did not offer much in the way of new argument, one of the speakers, Ernest Burns, voiced what must have been a common fear of the fishermen, that the price would drop to 10 or 15 cents if the union were defeated. From the union's point of view the demonstration was highly successful: 200 new members had been signed up in 24 hours before the parade, the crowd donated from 225 to 300 dollars, and the press gave extensive reports of the proceedings.⁴⁴

The second week of the fishing season ended, therefore, with no sign of a break in the strike--it was on the contrary, becoming more widespread and increasingly effectively enforced as the unions marshalled their forces. The canners nevertheless showed no signs of being willing to negotiate. They evidently hoped that the presence of the police would induce numbers of fishermen to go out under their protection. Individual canners predicted during the week that up to 75 percent of the fishermen would return

⁴⁴ News-Advertiser, July 15, 1900, p. 8; Province, July 16, p. 3; World, July 16, p. 8.

to fishing when this protection was provided,⁴⁵ and Sunday night, the opening of the week's fishing, was their target date.⁴⁶ But Sunday night came and went, and no return to work occurred. The Japanese, on whom the cannery had placed their hopes, stood firm in their agreement with the other fishermen. Around Steveston, the heart of the strike, the only boats on the river were those with union permits⁴⁷ to fish for food. In other parts of the widespread reaches of the river and its delta, the strike was probably not so well observed.

The union had begun to dig in for a prolonged struggle. In addition to the collections on occasions like the Vancouver demonstration, donations were being solicited from Vancouver merchants. A wagon load of bread, donated by union bakers in Vancouver, rolled⁴⁸ out to Steveston, as part of the evidence of trade union support. A commissary was set up in a house in a field near Steveston, which also served as union headquarters, and here several hundred men were⁴⁹ fed daily. Preparations were being made to seek support even further afield--MacClain and the Indian brass band were about to go to Nanaimo to rally support and get donations among the union-conscious⁵⁰ miners.

⁴⁵ News-Advertiser, July 3, 1900, p. 8.

⁴⁶ World, July 14, 1900, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Province, July 16, 1900, p. 3.

⁴⁸ World, July 17, 1900, p. 1; July 18, p. 3; Province, July 17, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Independent, July 28, 1900, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Province, July 19, 1900, p. 2.

At the beginning of the week, the canners were forced to face the fact that they had to negotiate--the strike was strong, the sockeye run was reported in the Gulf outside the river mouth, though still not running in the river, and no more time could be lost. The canners met Tuesday morning, July 17, and amid much grumbling--they refused to meet anyone but bona fide fishermen-- they appointed a committee to meet the fishermen's committee, which had arrived in town with a request to meet the Association executive. ⁵¹

The conference took place on Wednesday with E. P. Bremner, the recently appointed Dominion Labor Commissioner for British Columbia in attendance. ⁵² During the course of an all-day meeting the canners made an offer on prices, their first genuine attempt to negotiate. The maximum price was to remain at 20 cents, but would be reduced to 15 cents in a heavy run and the canneries would not take more fish than they could ^{handle} can. The range of prices between 15 and 20 cents was to be governed not only by the quantity of fish obtainable at both Fraser River and up-coast points, but also by the state of the market. Since the fishermen's delegates had no instructions other than to press for 25 cents, they were obliged to ask for an adjournment until Friday. That evening the union in Vancouver held a meeting, which adjourned until 10 p.m. to enable reports to come in from the Japanese union and the white fishermen

⁵¹ World, July 17, 1900, p. 1.

⁵² Province, June 22, 1900, p. 3. Bremner had been appointed a commissioner to conciliate labor disputes in British Columbia, under the Alien Labor Act.

at Steveston and the North Arm, as well as from the Indians. All localities rejected the offer of the canners, but negotiations were continued with the delegates being instructed to meet again with the canners' committee on Friday and to convey this decision to them.⁵³

The New Westminster union fishermen were reported to be preparing to ask the canners, through Dominion Labor Commissioner Bremner, for a straight 20 cents through the season, with limits, when in effect, to be imposed equally on all fishermen.⁵⁴

The Friday conference opened in an atmosphere of optimism. Both sides were under considerable outside pressure to settle--the local newspapers, for instance, called editorially for concessions on both sides.⁵⁵ Reports were current that an agreement would soon be reached and fishing would commence on Sunday night. The fishermen's unions had even drawn up an agreement embodying their terms for settlement of the strike. A fixed price was to be set for the season, with a month's notice on either side of a desire to alter it. Limits on deliveries, where necessary, were to be the same for individual boats as for cannery boats. Strikers were not to be discriminated against. Men owning their own gear were to be free

⁵³ News-Advertiser, July 19, 1900, p. 8; Province, July 19, p. 3; World, July 19, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Columbian, July 19, 1900, p. 1.

⁵⁵ World, July 18, 1900, p. 4; News-Advertiser, July 19, p. 4; Province, July 20, p. 6.

to deliver to any cannery. Finally, the strike was to terminate⁵⁶ only after an agreement had been signed.

The early part of the conference seemed to justify the optimism. When the fishermen had explained their reasons for rejection of Wednesday's offer, the canners made an alternative proposal to pay 18 cents right through the season. The fishermen's delegates retired to consider this and returned to counter by asking for 20 cents for the whole season, a move in line with the New Westminster proposal and agreed to in the conference break by the⁵⁷ other groups by a 3 to 2 vote. The two sides were now only two cents apart, and before the afternoon session was completed, the World prematurely reported that the logical compromise--19 cents--⁵⁸ was the probable settlement, quoting a canner as its source. But this was not to be, for the canners' committee coupled with its offer of 18 cents an ultimatum to the delegation. If the fishermen agreed to the offer, the canners would receive their assent through the delegation. Otherwise, it would be useless to arrange further⁵⁹ meetings. The conference then broke up and that evening the fishermen met again in Vancouver. To this meeting it was reported that New Westminster and the Japanese were prepared to fish for

56 News-Advertiser, July 20, 1900, p. 8; Province, July 20, p. 3.

57 Province, July 20, 1900, p. 3; Columbian, July 20, p. 4.

58 World, July 20, 1900, p. 1.

59 Province, July 21, 1900, p. 3.

20 cents (presumably through the whole season), while Steveston and the North Arm still held out for 25 cents. The Vancouver men voted not to accept less than 25 cents a fish--the 18-cent offer⁶⁰ was apparently rejected without even being voted on. Thus the deadlock between canners and fishermen remained.

The canners' intentions in these final negotiations are hard to assess. On the credit side they made a second offer moving up from 15 cents minimum to 18 cents. On the negative side they coupled their second offer with an ultimatum. If they were sincerely anxious for a settlement, this ultimatum is hard to understand since the union delegation had come down (though, it is true, by only a majority vote of the delegation) to 20 cents. Two weeks later and after bitter travail, the compromise figure of 19 cents was the one finally agreed to. But without access to records of the Canners' Association, it is impossible to say why negotiations were broken off when a settlement was so close.

Fragmentary evidence hints a division in the canners' ranks both on union recognition and on prices. C. S. Windsor, in favoring recognition of the union, provided it was led by bona fide fishermen,⁶¹ admitted that other canners did not favor this approach. The problem of prices seems to have been linked to the prices paid at up-coast points--the price on the Skeena that year was eight or

60 B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1011.

61 B.C., Journals, 1900, p. clviii.

62
nine cents. The canners' first offer specified that the supply of
fish at up-coast points was to be included in any formula governing
the fluctuation of prices between 15 and 20 cents. 63
Cannery plants both on the Fraser and at up-coast points may have feared
that high prices on the Fraser would lead to demands for price
increases in the other areas. Perhaps the problem was that a price
differential of 10 cents or more between the Fraser River and
northern canneries would place those canners operating only on the
Fraser at a disadvantage compared to those who also had plants in
the north. Though Skeena River canned salmon traditionally sold
for less than the Fraser River product--a differential of 50 cents
64
a case was reported in 1900--the difference in cost of fish would
more than compensate for the lower selling price.

The measures that the canners turned to, once negotiations
broke down, appear to have been decided upon prior to the end of the
conference, since the very same evening before the fishermen finally
turned down the 18-cent offer, there was a clash with striking
fishermen at Steveston, a clash that was clearly deliberately

62 Colonist, July 20, 1900, p. 8.

63 News-Advertiser, July 19, 1900, p. 8.

64 Ibid., July 24, 1900, p. 5.

65

provoked. W. A. Munro, the manager of Phoenix cannery, one of the Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company's plants, sent out two fishing boats, protected by ten special constables in three cannery tugs. Chief Constable Lister reported to his superiors in Victoria that this was done "evidently to test the attitude of the strikers."⁶⁶

As might be expected, union patrols responded vigorously. Led by Rogers, they seized one boat with its boat-puller, though failing to capture the second. The captured boat was towed to the wharf at Steveston. There the unfortunate boat-puller was hauled up on a box by Rogers, to be jeered at as a "scab" and then manhandled by the crowd who treated him "like a football" as he fled.⁶⁷

This episode gave the canners their justification for

65 One possible explanation of the timing of this episode was that the canners who advocated a hard line toward the strikers were trying to force their less bellicose associates into an attempt to break the strike. Any theory about "hawks" and "doves" among the canners is mere speculation, but it is interesting to note that the provocation was organized at a plant of Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company, Ltd. This company was managed by Henry O. Bell-Irving, an advocate of the hard line in past disputes, and Dr. Duncan Bell-Irving, H.O.'s brother, was on the canners' executive committee. The Province had heard rumors, before its deadline on Friday, while the conference was still going on, of "something in the wind that is being kept very close by the canners," but took it to mean that Japanese were going out (July 20, 1900, p. 3).

66 A full discussion of this episode is contained in the evidence given before the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly (B.C., Journals, 1900, p. cxlix (evidence of Robert Whiteside, J.P.); pp. cliv-clv (evidence of W. A. Munro); pp. clxii, clxiv, clxv (evidence of Chief Constable R. B. Lister); pp. clxx-clxxi, clxxiii-clxxiv (evidence of Hugh Campbell); pp. clxxvii-clxxix (evidence of Frank Rogers).

67 Ibid.

fresh appeals to the authorities. Though, the newspapers reported, the incident did not take place until 9:30 p.m., a telegram, signed by Dr. Duncan Bell-Irving and William Farrell of the Cannery Association executive committee (but not in the name of the Association) was dispatched with suspicious promptness that same evening. It called the special constables "useless" and said the police were unable to cope with the situation, citing numerous other (unspecified) "outrages" on other parts of the river. Significantly, it quotes an opinion of the situation as "most serious" from an agent of Pinkerton's, a United States detective agency notorious for its strike-breaking activities, who had been⁶⁸ on the scene when the incident occurred.

This telegram was followed the next day, Saturday, June 21, by two more, this time directed to Premier James Dunsmuir and signed⁶⁹ in the name of the Fraser River Cannery Association. One repeated the claims about the special constables who, it said, stood by and "saw riot and unlawful acts by the strikers without attempting to offer aid." Lister was said to be unable to cope with the situation. "Many men" were intending to fish and the telegram predicted "serious riots" when they began to carry out their intention. The cannery argued that the militia was "urgently required or great loss of life

⁶⁸ B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1009. Another wire referred to the man as "our detective" (ibid., p. 1010).

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 1010.

and property would result." The second telegram, besides recommending that Provincial Police Constable Colin Campbell of Vancouver be put in charge, asked the provincial government to send the steamer "Quadra" (which in any case was operated by the federal government!) with armed and uniformed men to patrol off Steveston.

Another telegram was dispatched to Ottawa, presumably to the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, asking for protection against violence allegedly threatened by the strikers. ⁷⁰ It claimed to speak in the name of some of the licensed fishermen who had expressed a willingness to fish and desired protection, and argued that the federal authorities, in collecting license fees, had undertaken an obligation to offer such protection. It again asserted that the police were unable to cope with the situation and suggested that the canners had been forced to take steps to ensure a "better force" was put into the field. The newspaper coupled this report with a suggestion that consideration might have to be given to calling out the militia.

The Vancouver Board of Trade was also wheeled into line by the canners to fire a round or two on their behalf. At a special meeting of the Board called for Saturday afternoon, only 20 or so of the Board's approximately 200 members turned up, including, naturally, a number of canners. Over the protests of several members who argued that the Board was advocating the use of force against

70 Province, July 21, 1900, p. 3.

the strikers, this meeting passed a resolution, presented by Henry O. Bell-Irving, charging that a "state of lawlessness" existed on the Fraser River and that fishermen who wanted to fish were being "intimidated and prevented from doing so." Characterizing the present protection for these men as "entirely inadequate," it asked the provincial government to take "immediate steps for the full protection of life and property." An amendment asking the Board to confine itself to supporting a resolution asking for mediation by the provincial government, previously passed by the New Westminster Board of Trade and circulated for endorsement to Vancouver and Victoria, was defeated. To placate the minority, however, a second resolution, endorsing the position of the New Westminster Board, was forwarded along with its more vehement companion.⁷¹

Events moved rapidly to a climax. There was feverish activity in the Cannery Association, which held meetings off and on all Saturday. By Sunday morning, the cannery had produced a "more definite" version of their first offer, made on the previous Wednesday,⁷² for a price ranging between 15 and 20 cents. The new terms provided for 20 cents to be paid for the first 600 fish delivered in each week and 15 cents for any over that figure.

⁷¹ Province, July 23, 1900, p. 3; World, July 23, p. 3; B.C., S.P., 1900, pp. 1009, 1010 (texts of New Westminster and Vancouver telegrams).

⁷² Province, July 23, 1900, p. 1.

Canneries would take at those prices all the fish they could handle and in case limits on delivery were necessary in a heavy run, each cannery would take the same number of fish from each boat, whether it was fishing on shares or contract. These terms represented a considerable improvement over the original offer, even if the canners tried to disguise their concessions as a clarification. The promise of 20 cents a fish for a definite quantity went some way towards meeting the views of those fishermen who had said they would fish for 20 cents. The pledge of equal treatment when limits were put on deliveries also met another of the fishermen's demands.

Since the canners had terminated negotiations by their ultimatum and were now not prepared apparently to recognize the union by dealing with it, this offer had to be delivered to the fishermen by way of posters, which were put up in Steveston on Sunday afternoon, July 22. The reaction of union fishermen there was to vote down the offer, in spite of pleas by Mr. E. P. Bremner, Dominion Labor Commissioner, for them to think twice before rejecting it. Voting was by secret ballot, the 541 votes being counted by two of the newspaper reporters at the meeting. Tally was 492 for 25 cents, 15 for 22-1/2 cents, 27 for 20 cents and seven spoiled ballots.⁷³ This was the vote of the hard-core of strikers, those men who, as Watson said, were so incensed at the canners that they

⁷³ World, July 23, 1900, p. 3.

were determined to hold out for 25 cents.⁷⁴ Among the leaders who spoke, Burns and MacClain notably refrained from advising the men how to vote on the offer, and confined themselves to urging them to abide by majority decision, a position that suggests they⁷⁵ inclined to a compromise at less than 25 cents. The temper of the meeting was such, however, that any compromise suggestion⁷⁶ brought angry denunciations from the rank and file fishermen.

During the 24 hours after the canners had posted their latest offer, contacts were reportedly made between the Association and the Japanese.⁷⁷ The report says that an agreement was signed with the Japanese union, and the canners themselves mentioned a⁷⁸ "further agreement" in a wire to Eberts on Sunday. Whether any formal agreement was signed or not, the Japanese held a huge meeting in Steveston on Monday afternoon which was attended by from 3,500 to 4,000 men. After hearing speeches by several "Japanese labor contractors" and Y. Yamasaki, secretary of the "union", the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society, they decided in a great burst of cheering to accept the canners' latest offer⁷⁹ and to return to work the next morning. Afterwards, they formed

⁷⁴ Province, July 20, 1900, p. 3.

⁷⁵ World, July 23, 1900, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Province, July 23, 1900, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Columbian, July 23, 1900, p. 1.

⁷⁸ B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1012.

⁷⁹ World, July 24, 1900, p. 1.

up in a procession, said to be four blocks long, headed by the
80 Japanese flag, and paraded through the streets of Steveston. Later
in the afternoon, the union men could only muster from 500 to 600
men to a meeting intended as a counter-demonstration and did not
attempt their own parade. The stage was now set for the long-feared
clash--a clash much talked about up to this time by canners, fisher-
men and newspapers--between the Japanese and the other fishermen.

As we have seen, the Cannery Association was convinced
that the force of special constables had to be replaced by something
more effective, before any fishermen would go back to work. On
Saturday they had tried to get both federal and provincial govern-
ments to provide a strengthened force, and had suggested that one
way of providing such a force was to call out the militia. By Monday
they had answers from both governments of a kind which made it plain
that neither one was prepared to take the responsibility for calling
out the militia. Legally neither government could have sent the
militia out "in aid of the civil power" under the terms of the
Militia and Defence Act (46 Vict. Chap. 41). Section 34 of the Act
provided that in such cases the call had to come from the justices
of the peace in the municipality affected, either from the chairman
of the Quarter Sessions of the Peace or in a requisition signed by
three justices of the peace. The federal department of Marine and
Fisheries had referred the requests for protection back to the

80 B.C., Journals, 1900, p. clxiv.

to the provincial government, since law enforcement in the province came under the Attorney-General.⁸¹ When the provincial government received the canners' wires, the Attorney-General had sharply rebuked poor Lister for failing to provide the necessary protection, and in spite of Lister's defence that he had provided protection on the only two occasions it had been asked for, went ahead with plans to replace him by Chief Constable W. H. Bullock-Webster from Nelson.⁸² But, though the provincial authorities were prepared to add to the force of special constables and to give it different leadership, they were evidently not prepared to do anything about the militia. Their reluctance to take the initiative is probably to be explained by the sharp criticism which had been directed against the province for illegal procedures on previous occasions when the militia had been called out in aid of the civil power.⁸³

By Monday, it must have been apparent to the canners that they were not going to get much help from either government. Their wire on Sunday for police from Victoria to assist Webster, or for the militia, was replied to by Attorney-General Eberts in terms which left no doubt that such a force would not be forthcoming.⁸⁴ Once

⁸¹ B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1013.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 1011-13.

⁸³ Peter Guy Silverman, "A History of the Militia and Defences of British Columbia, 1871-1914," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, April, 1956, pp. 160 et seq.

⁸⁴ B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1012.

the agreement with the Japanese was in prospect, the canners had immediate need of a force to protect these strike-breakers and lacked confidence in the police already on the scene. In these circumstances, they went ahead with their own plans to fulfill the legal requirements for calling out the militia. As a subsequent legislative inquiry made clear, the possible "riot, disturbance or other emergency" was anticipated not by the three justices of the peace who signed the requisition, but by the canners. The requisition, addressed to the senior military officer in the area, Lieutenant-Colonel S. A. Worsnop, of the Sixth Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles, with headquarters and its main force in Vancouver and a company also in New Westminster, was prepared under the canners' direction in Vancouver. The Pinkerton agent, Donahue by name,⁸⁵ now stepped out of the shadows again as bearer of the requisition to Steveston. That evening at Malcolm and Windsor's cannery a number of canners met with Chief Constable Lister and Assistant Superintendent of the Provincial Police Frank Murray. Also present were two justices of the peace, Edward Hunt, a Steveston storekeeper, and a former partner in a cannery, and Robert Whiteside, foreman of the Pacific

⁸⁵ Various spelling of the name are used. The Province gave his name as "F. Donohoe" in the following "social note" after the strike: "Mr. F. Donohoe, who has represented the interests of the Fraser River Canners' Association during the recent fishermen's strike, leaves to-morrow morning for DeKalb, Ill., to visit a sister whom he has not seen for ten years. Mr. Donohoe has had many years experience in labor troubles and has lately shown himself most impartial and fair-minded [sic] in such affairs" (Aug. 6, 1900, p. 8).

Coast cannery. Their role in the meeting can be judged from the fact that the decision to call the militia was made by motion of the meeting, and neither man could tell the legislative inquiry what specific breaches of the peace or apprehended breaches of the peace had moved him to sign the requisition. The third justice, Reeve M. B. Wilkinson, owner of the Dinsmore cannery, was not even in Steveston, but seven miles away at the North Arm. After he had been reached by telephone, the requisition was taken there for his signature and then sent to Vancouver where it arrived at 1:30 a.m. July 24. Colonel Worsnop, who had been told that it was coming, took prompt action.⁸⁶ The Vancouver contingent sailed aboard the steamer "Comox" shortly after 3 a.m. pursued by the jeers⁸⁷ of a Vancouver crowd that gathered at the wharf, and arrived in Steveston just after six in the morning where they were joined by the New Westminster contingent. The Japanese, who had meanwhile made all their preparations for fishing, were to go out at eight⁸⁸ o'clock, but waited until ten for a favorable tide. As literally hundreds of boats set out from canneries all along the dyke at Steveston, the white and Indian strikers stood helplessly by, deprived even of their leader, Frank Rogers, who had been arrested

⁸⁶ B.C., Journals, 1900, pp. cxlii-cliii (evidence of M. B. Wilkinson, Edward Hunt, Robert Whiteside, Colonel S. A. Worsnop); pp. clvii (evidence of Charles S. Windsor); p. clxiii (evidence of R. B. Lister); pp. clxvii-clxviii (evidence of Frank Murray).

⁸⁷ Province, July 25, 1900, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid., July 24, 1900, p. 1.

the previous day on charges arising out of the fracas on Friday
89
night and taken to jail in Vancouver.

The calling out of the militia may have followed the letter of the law but the method adopted violated its spirit, as an inquiry by a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly clearly indicated. The initiative came, not as provided by the law, from the justices of the peace, but from the canners. One justice was not even on the scene of the possible disturbances and the other two were unable to give the inquiry specific instances that would have constituted an anticipated emergency beyond the power of the civil authorities to deal with, as required by the Act. The inquiry had before it a copy of a wire sent that same evening 90 by Lister to the Attorney-General in Victoria reporting "all quiet." Evidence of immediate disturbances was, then, lacking. The evidence for anticipating such disturbances would break out was contradictory. The Select Committee, which was set up primarily to determine the extent, if any, of provincial responsibility for the calling out of the militia, side-stepped evaluation of this evidence, saying in its report only that "there is a conflict of evidence, some witnesses swearing that there was no reason to apprehend danger, while others swore that they believed there would be trouble in

89 World, July 23, 1900, p. 8.

90 B.C., S.P., 1900, p. 1012.

the event of the Japanese commencing fishing."⁹¹

Did any danger in fact exist and would the militia have been more effective than the special constables in dealing with it? Feeling was high, undoubtedly hot words were spoken and threats made, but the relative balance of forces among striking fishermen in Steveston that Monday before the Japanese went out to fish made any head-on clash very unlikely. The Japanese were able to muster upwards of 3,000 men, while other striking fishermen assembled only about 600. With such a large preponderance of strength against them and with the scales weighted further by presence of a large force of special constables, it seems improbable that the remaining strikers would have tried conclusions with the Japanese in a pitched battle on shore. The real problem was to protect the strike-breakers on the fishing grounds. There the difficulty was inherent in the type of fishing, where boats, each carrying only two men, were spread out in a wide area at the mouth of the Fraser River, and from five to ten miles out in the Gulf of Georgia, in an arc from the International Boundary to Point Atkinson at the mouth of English Bay. This was the problem that Lister felt he could not cope with--the incident on the previous Friday, near Phoenix cannery, even though it took place in the confines of the river, proved that the cannery tugs were relatively helpless in face of a group of determined men in the highly manoeuvrable skiffs and boats used by the fishermen.

91 B.C., Journals, 1900, p. cxli.

Unless transport had been provided, the militia could no more have effectively patrolled this danger zone than could the special constables. Many more tugs than were available would have been needed since ordinary steamers would have been useless in the net-strewn waters. The effect, therefore, of calling out the militia was purely psychological--a further evidence to the strikers of the overwhelming array of forces against them. Their sense of helplessness was reported to have been expressed in these terms: "There are 4,000 Japs, 200 militia, 100 police, and the canners, against 700 British fishermen and a few Canadian Indians."⁹²

Once the Japanese had begun to fish under the watchful eyes of militia and police, the prospects must indeed have appeared dark to the strikers. At first glance, no hope of a negotiated settlement seemed to remain, and they faced the prospect of staying out for the rest of the season, or of going back individually on any terms the canners would give. Yet, less than a week later, these men were back fishing for a price negotiated with the canners, a happy outcome which in the shock of the first few hours of Tuesday, after the arrival of the troops, none of the strikers could have foreseen.

92 Province, July 26, 1900, p. 1.

CHAPTER V

THE 1900 STRIKE--PHASE TWO

With the arrival of the militia and the return of the Japanese to fishing, the strike entered a new and critical phase. During the two previous weeks, the strength of the strikers had lain in their power to prevent any fisherman, union or non-union, from fishing. Union patrols had swept the river clean and few strike violators, except on the very fringe of the grounds, had¹ escaped their attention. But when the Japanese began to fish and to deliver their catch to the canneries, the situation became very different. Union patrols in command of the river were replaced by² patrols of police in cannery tugs, which were soon partially withdrawn, however, because the union patrols, unable to force non-strikers to hang up their nets, continued only in diminished numbers, and were largely ineffective.³ A settlement of the strike on terms favorable to the strikers depended, therefore, upon factors

¹ Many contemporary comments on the effectiveness of the strike are based on reports that boats were out fishing. These seem to have resulted from a failure to understand the union system of permits for fishing for food (B.C., Journals, 1900, p. clxxvii - evidence of Frank Rogers) and the continued fishing, with a larger-sized net, for spring salmon (Columbian, July 14, 1900, p. 4).

² Colonist, July 25, 1900, p. 1; Province, July 25, p. 1.

³ Province, July 27, 1900, p. 1; July 27, p. 6; Columbian, July 25, p. 4.

other than their ability to keep the canners from getting a supply of fish, even a supply less than normal.

In the days that followed the Japanese action on Tuesday morning, the canners kept saying that the strike was over, and the newspapers carried various reports of a return to work of white fishermen at the North Arm, and in New Westminster, and of an imminent resumption of fishing by the Indians. By the end of the week, however, it was apparent that the strike was still being observed by most of the white fishermen, by the bulk of the Indians, and even by a group of Japanese, termed by Rogers the "old-time" Japanese, and estimated by him to number 600.⁵ The licenses held by this group represented a substantial proportion of the total of the 3,683 licenses issued in 1900 on the Fraser River--not less than one-third, perhaps as much as one-half.⁶ This was no inconsiderable proportion of the fishing labor force, and the canners could do without their services only if a heavy run of sockeye made it possible for a few boats to supply the canneries to the limit of their packing capacities.

⁴ Colonist, July 26, 1900, p. 1; News-Advertiser, July 26, 1900, p. 8; July 27, p. 1; July 28, p. 1; Province, July 25, 1900, p. 1; July 27, p. 6; World, July 25, 1900, p. 1.

⁵ World, July 25, 1900, p. 1. He amended this figure to 250 in his appearance before the Select Committee (B.C., Journals, 1900, p. clxxviii).

⁶ 1,076 whites and 555 Indians got licenses and a proportion of the 393 company licenses were held by whites or Indians (See above p. 48 - Table V).

The run, however, stayed light. This was reason enough for the canners, once they had time to assess their position after the first flush of their victory on Tuesday, to think again about reaching a settlement with the fishermen who continued to hold out. Some canneries were in a more difficult position than others with respect to their supply of labor: these canneries, said to be eight in number, had never employed Japanese fishermen and, therefore, did not benefit from their return to work. After several days, the Canners' Association allotted to them a proportion of the fish delivered to other canneries by the Japanese.⁸ This action further reduced each cannery's already small supply of fish and could be only a temporary solution.

The Indians, with rare exceptions, stayed with the strikers. Their close-knit tribal organization, plus their antipathy to the Japanese who were displacing them from the industry, made them among the strongest supporters of the strike,⁹ even though they would suffer most from loss of the season's earnings. When the strike was prolonged, there were signs that most Indians, rather than break with their union allies, were simply preparing to leave for their homes

7 News-Advertiser, July 27, 1900, p. 8; Colonist, July 27, p. 1; World, July 28, p. 1.

8 World, July 26, 1900, p. 1; Province, July 27, p. 6.

9 Province, July 26, 1900, p. 1; Percy Gladstone and Stuart Jamieson, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," CJEPS, vol. 16 (May 1950), pp. 154-5.

and forfeit the rest of the season's work. A general exodus of Indians would pose another problem for the canners; their operations would be partially crippled by the loss of the services of the Indian women and children who were employed in processing.

The Chinese, who made up most of the rest of the labor force in the canneries, had taken no part in the dispute. The strikers now suggested that they might be able to persuade the Chinese, who had no particular love for their fellow Asians, not to process fish caught by the Japanese. Contacts were made with the Chinese, but any prospect of their joining the strikers faded abruptly as the canneries started operations with their usual
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Chinese crews at work. The chief losers from any Chinese refusal to work would have been the Chinese labor contractors, and they undoubtedly strongly influenced the rejection of such a boycott.

In addition to their problems with the strikers, the canneries faced difficulties with the fishermen they had persuaded to go back to work. The Japanese who were fishing included newcomers from Japan, most of them inexperienced, if not in fishing, at least in the type of fishing done on the Fraser River, and unused
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to the Fraser River gillnet boats. These, then, were not the most

10 Columbian, July 26, 1900, p. 4; Province, July 25, p. 1; World, July 25, p. 1.

11 World, July 24, 1900, p. 1; July 25, p. 1; News-Advertiser, July 25, p. 5.

12 World, July 24, 1900, p. 1; Columbian, July 25, p. 4; News-Advertiser, July 25, p. 5.

productive of fishermen. The canners had another source of difficulty arising from the methods by which the Japanese had been persuaded to go back to work. Because of the language barrier, the great majority of them had no way of communicating with the other fishermen.

Japanese favorable to the union charged that their fellow countrymen had been misled into going back by leaders who told them that the whites and Indians were also returning to work.¹³ Union men bitterly

denounced the "treachery" of Kamekich Oki, the labor contractor at Lighthouse cannery and vice-president of the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society,¹⁴ who was supposed to have received \$1,500 for¹⁵ persuading his members to give up the strike. From union sources,

also, came reports of Japanese putting their nets on the racks again¹⁶ when they learned that the strike was continuing. Even if we discount these reports, it is true that the Japanese were not fishing as long hours as usual: apprehension about possible net-cutting or similar guerilla action by the strikers kept them from fishing at¹⁷ night.

13 Province, July 25, 1900, p. 1.

14 World, July 25, 1900, p. 8.

15 Columbian, July 26, 1900, p. 4. Other reports circulated that each Japanese contractor had received \$100 (World, July 25, p. 1).

16 Colonist, July 26, 1900, p. 1; World, July 26, p. 1.

17 Columbian, July 26, 1900, p. 4. A rash of net-cutting did occur, but after the end of the strike, presumably reflecting hostilities built up during the strike.

All these factors were favorable to some kind of settlement, but in the first shock of the Japanese defection, the remaining strikers (led by the union, but not all union members) seemed to be without any plan which might achieve this end. Tuesday was a day of confusion and disarray. For one thing, that morning the strikers were without two of their most forceful leaders. Frank Rogers had only just been released on bail from the jail in Vancouver where he had been held overnight, and he still had to make his way to
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Steveston by stage; and Will MacClain was in Nanaimo, where he had gone with the Fort Simpson band to attempt to rally support and
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donations from the miners. How important these leaders, especially Rogers, were to the union can be seen in the failure, in spite of attempts by some of the strikers, to get any kind of a meeting going until Rogers arrived.

At this meeting, a short one, the strikers rejected again the cannery's "final" offer of Sunday, June 22, and doggedly repeated their demand for 25 cents. The meeting was only a preliminary to a parade, said to be intended as a reply to the Japanese demonstration of the previous day. Whites and Indians formed up in a procession
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that marched through the streets of Steveston. Events took a

18 Province, July 24, 1900, p. 1. Charges against him were later dropped by the Crown (World, July 25, pp. 1, 8).

19 Province, July 23, 1900, p. 3.

20 Estimates of the numbers in the parade vary wildly, from 500 to 600 in the World to 3,000 in the Province and News-Advertiser (World, July 24, 1900, p. 1; Province, July 24, p. 1; News-Advertiser, July 25, p. 5).

possibly dangerous turn when the demonstration circled the headquarters of the military at Gulf of Georgia cannery, where strikers jeered the soldiers and sang, with intentional irony, "Soldiers of the Queen" and parodies directed at the troops. The militia stood to arms under these provocations, but after Colonel Worsnop ignored the demands of Henry Bell-Irving that the Riot Act be read, the²¹ procession dispersed without further incident. A second meeting followed in the afternoon, mostly taken up with expressions of hostility to the canners, the Japanese and the soldiers. At this meeting, Dominion Labor Commissioner Bremner made a start at getting the strikers back to seeking a settlement. In spite of rowdy opposition to his initial suggestion that they accept the canners' terms, the strikers at length agreed to his continuing to try to negotiate with the canners. The meeting authorized him to put three questions to the canners: Would 20 cents be paid throughout the season; would the canners submit to arbitration; and would²² they recognize the union.

The question about arbitration owes its inclusion in part to a current campaign of a section of the trade union movement for compulsory arbitration as a means of forcing employers to bargain with their employees and arrive at negotiated settlements. In the

21 Colonist, July 25, 1900, p. 1.

22 Province, July 24, 1900, p. 1; Colonist, July 25, p. 1; News-Advertiser, July 25, p. 5.

session of the provincial Legislative Assembly then under way, a motion on this subject was introduced by Ralph Smith, member for N²³anaimo City and long-time secretary of the miners' union. To the fishermen, arbitration meant the canners opening their books so that the price of fish could be set in accordance with what they could²⁴ actually pay. From the granting of this demand, the union hoped to get proof that the canners could afford the 25 cents the fishermen were asking. Apparently Bremner did not press the demand for arbitration. He probably felt that considering the current temper of the canners, this demand had no chance of even being considered. He certainly thought that the lapse of time before any arbitration could be completed would lose the fishermen their whole season, for during later negotiations, he raised this point again, and suggested to the fishermen that they return to work on the canners' terms,²⁵ pending a final price settlement through arbitration. The union men objected to this suggestion and the proposal was dropped.

At this point, the demand for union recognition assumed a greater importance in the strike than it had previously done. In the earlier stages of the dispute the unionists had been satisfied with the de facto recognition given by the canners in meeting with the union delegates. But after the canners' ultimatum that broke up

23 B.C., Journals, 1900, p. 115.

24 Colonist, Aug. 1, 1900, p. 6.

25 News-Advertiser, July 29, 1900, p. 4.

negotiations and their subsequent refusal to deal with the union, backed by the delivery of offers by letter and poster, the strikers put forward recognition of their union as one of the terms for any settlement. Then, too, their attitude was stiffened by the denunciation of their leaders as not bona fide fishermen and the assertion that all differences could have been speedily adjusted except for the intervention of these outsiders. The union leaders would have been less than human if these attacks had not made them more determined to force the canners to deal with the union through its officers. In this determination they could draw for support on a natural feeling among fishermen that in the past they had not been dealt with on a basis of equality by the canners. Yet this demand for union recognition remained subordinate to the necessities of a price settlement. Leaders like Rogers and Watson, with their trade union loyalties, might put it first in their public utterances, but, as events showed, the fishermen, though they may have desired a change in the method of arriving at prices, were not prepared to hold out on this issue when a price settlement was in sight.

As the fishermen prepared to seek fresh negotiations, however, the demand for union recognition loomed large as a possible obstacle to agreement. Rogers gave it first place in any solution: "Let them recognize the union now and the rest will be easy, but they must deal with the fishermen as an organized body of men or²⁶ there will be no settlement." Watson excoriated the canners for

²⁶ World, July 25, 1900, p. 8.

the "quibbles" by which, over the months, they had sought to avoid dealing with the fishermen's unions. He warned them that "the Union is here to stop," and that they would have to deal with it next year as well as this.²⁷ The canners, on the other hand, were now not at all disposed to recognize the union. They felt they had broken the strike and did not have to accept the "Socialist agitators" whom they identified as the leaders of the union. They were also quoted as fearing that recognition of the union would enable it to restrict fishing to union members only, thus reducing the labor force, or if all fishermen were enrolled in the union, enable it to prevent canners, by threats of strike action, from discharging fishermen "for cause."²⁸ The feelings of the Canners' Association were clearly indicated by their repudiation of C. S. Windsor, manager of United Canneries' Gulf of Georgia plant. Windsor was quoted as stating in the Association's name that "the fishermen have as much right to organize their union as the cannery-men have to form a combine" and as saying also that the canners would recognize and deal with the union provided the leaders were ²⁹bona fide fishermen.

²⁷ News-Advertiser, July 29, 1900, p. 3.

²⁸ Colonist, July 27, 1900, p. 1.

²⁹ World, July 26, 1900, p. 1. Windsor was compelled to make a humiliating denial of his remarks in a letter to the Executive Committee of the Canners' Association which was then published in the News-Advertiser (July 29, 1900, p. 1). By the next season he was no longer with the United Canneries, but started his own concern, Union Canneries, in the plant built by the co-operative Fraser River Industrial Society (B.C., Reg. of Cos., Files 63 (Co-op) and 607 (1897) [microfilm]). The name of the new venture does perhaps suggest that the remarks attributed to him may have had something to do with his leaving the United Canneries.

Immediately after the Tuesday meeting, Bremner set about his mediation efforts. Apparently he made little progress at first. The canners' only public reaction in the next few days to the union's repeated demand for 25 cents was to reiterate the offer of 20 and 15 cents accepted by the Japanese, and, by way of indirect reply to the union's charge that they would not give written agreements, to announce that contracts on this basis could be applied for by the individual fisherman at the cannery for which he fished.³⁰ Rumors of a split among canners over the position of the canneries which had never employed Japanese fishermen were quieted by the Executive Committee's announcement that fish would be allocated to them from³¹ the other canneries.

Besides the pressure created by the absence of part of their labor force, the biggest stimulus to the canners to re-open negotiations probably came from the debate in the Legislative Assembly on the strike, and especially on the calling out of the militia. In the previous few months, the province had passed through³² a period of intense political excitement, arising from the dismissal by Lieutenant-Governor T. R. McInnes of the Semlin ministry and his selection of Joseph Martin to form a government. Martin's lack of support in the Legislative Assembly had forced him to call a June

³⁰ Province, July 25, 1900, p. 1; News-Advertiser, July 26, p. 1.

³¹ World, July 26, 1900, p. 1; Columbian, July 26, p. 4.

³² Margaret A. Ormsby, British Columbia: a History, Toronto, Macmillan, 1958, pp. 321-24.

provincial election, which sealed his government's fate, and that of McInnes, but which did not see the emergence of any clear-cut alternative. This situation had been temporarily resolved a month before by the patching together of yet another coalition government. In its first session this rather shaky coalition faced an opposition of nearly equal size. At Wednesday's session, a strong attack on the calling out of the militia was launched by Ralph Smith and backed by other opposition members. They argued that the action had not been justified by the situation and demanded information about the circumstances leading to that drastic step--one member said the justices of the peace deserved the "severest censure." The government in reply was careful to point out that it had no responsibility for the decision. Its role, said the ministers, was one of refusing to aggravate the conflict by sending the large additional forces of special constables demanded by the canners. It had offered, through the Boards of Trade of New Westminster and Vancouver, to mediate, but neither canners or fishermen had responded to the offer. The debate revealed a general disposition among the members to favor the fishermen, whose law-abiding behaviour was noted and the canners were criticized--by a member with cannery interests--for not offering a minimum price earlier in the dispute. The opposition prodded the government to take further action to settle with the remaining strikers, and Bremner was praised on both sides of the House for his efforts.

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33 For reports of the debate see, Colonist, July 26, 1900, p. 6; News-Advertiser, July 26, p. 2.

The reports of this debate, as well as the growing realization among the canners that they needed all their fishermen back at work, undoubtedly strengthened Bremner's hand. Earlier in the week, Bremner's numerous contacts with the canners' executive had been reported "fruitless" and he himself was stigmatized as a "representative of the strikers."³⁴ But at the same time as the debate came fresh editorial demands for a settlement of the strike.³⁵ In this changed atmosphere, sufficient progress was made by Friday afternoon for Rogers to be able to say that a meeting of the Steveston strikers to be held on Saturday morning would appoint a committee with powers to discuss and sign an agreement with the Canners' Association.³⁶

During this week, the informal links between the diverse groups of strikers proved unequal to the stress of trying to hold the strikers together to get some sort of negotiated settlement. The problem stemmed from the failure to unite all fishermen (except the Japanese) into one union with central direction. The Joint Board created to co-ordinate the Vancouver and New Westminster locals,³⁷ seems never to have functioned and no other form of overall co-ordination was developed in its place.

³⁴ Colonist, July 27, 1900, p. 1.

³⁵ Province, July 26, 1900, p. 4; World, July 26, p. 4; News-Advertiser, July 27, p. 4.

³⁶ News-Advertiser, July 28, 1900, p. 5.

³⁷ See Chapter III, p. 99 above.

After the strike began, the Vancouver union was itself divided; while it still functioned in the city under Peter Wylie, the president, and J. H. Watson, chosen secretary pro. tem.,³⁸ a strike centre grew up at Steveston under the leadership of Frank Rogers, the vice-president. The importance of this centre grew with the development of the strike; Steveston had the largest concentration of canneries, and therefore the largest number of strikers; it was also in a strategic position for the direction of patrols, commanding the main channel and being at the nearest point to the grounds outside the mouth of the river. The physical division of the union may also have been accentuated by the political views of its leaders: Watson was an Independent Labor supporter, while Rogers gathered around him some of his fellow Socialists, like MacClain and Burns. The role in the strike of these latter two became a matter of controversy, since they spoke for the strikers, and yet were neither fishermen nor members of the union.

As the strike continued, embryo union locals developed in each locality where there were substantial groups of fishermen. In addition to the Steveston group, separate groups were formed by fishermen at the canneries on the North Arm of the Fraser River, at Ladner's Landing and at Canoe Pass, the latter both south of the main channel. What degree of organization existed outside Steveston is not known, but if the Steveston pattern was followed,

38 Province, July 19, 1900, p. 3.

each group functioned through a series of meetings, which elected chairmen and secretaries as the need arose, but did not create any continuing group of officers. Leadership, as can be seen in the case of Rogers, was largely on the basis of personality, not office.

Another section of the strike "front" came under the New Westminster local, which embraced chiefly the men who habitually fished in the upper reaches of the river, and, in many cases, had their homes in New Westminster. Outside this regional organization were the Indians. They were, in most cases, not formally members of the union, though they usually attended meetings in the area where they were camped, but were grouped in their tribal bands under the leadership of their chiefs.

The co-ordination of these loosely linked components developed on an ad hoc basis during the strike. At the outset, decisions continued to be taken in the name of the Vancouver union. In the first week or so, these decisions involved chiefly protests of one kind or another or, at most, a re-affirmation of the stand for 25 cents and they were taken without any consultation of the areas.³⁹ When the strike entered its second week and negotiations were in prospect, a committee was set up representing the Vancouver, New Westminster and Japanese unions and the local groups in Steveston⁴⁰ and the North Arm. The Indians had no representation. Voting on

39 Independent, July 14, 1900, p. 1.

40 Ibid., July 21, 1900, p. 1.

reports of the committee was done in each of the groups and the Indians were also consulted, the results being passed on to the committee. On the only occasion when the committee is known to have voted on tactics, voting was by unit, each group having one⁴¹ vote. Once negotiations had been broken off, this committee apparently lapsed. Because the canners refused to meet with any but bona fide fishermen, the committee did not include the actual leaders of the strike and therefore did not develop into a central strike committee, as it might have done with a different membership. Strike co-ordination then reverted to the previous informal contacts.

In the absence of central direction, this rather ramshackle structure threatened to fall apart during the crisis caused by the defection of the Japanese. On Monday, July 23, when the canners were circulating their offer for 20 cents for the first 600 fish a week and 15 cents over that number, groups in Vancouver and the⁴² North Arm voted to accept it. Since both were much smaller groups than the one at Steveston (the North Arm being perhaps one-quarter as large, and only a comparative handful being left in Vancouver), they did not speak for anything like the majority of union fishermen. This fact decided the North Arm group not to return to fishing until they saw what Steveston was going to do. Vancouver, on the other hand, over the protests of some of its members who left in disgust

⁴¹ See Chapter IV, p. 126 above.

⁴² World, July 24, 1900, p. 1

to go to Steveston, met with the canners.⁴³ Whether they asked for union recognition and an agreement signed with the union as a condition of accepting the offer is not clear, but if so, they were not successful. They were bluntly told that contracts for individual fishermen at the prices offered by the canners were available at⁴⁴ the canneries.

The next break came among the Indians. On Thursday and Friday a number of them who fished for the Pacific Coast cannery⁴⁵ took out their boats under guard of police on tugs. The canners made attempts to get the rest of the Indians also to go back to work; on Thursday evening a large meeting of Indians was held at Canoe Pass, and was attended by Dr. Duncan Bell-Irving of the Executive Committee of the Canners' Association, and A. W. Vowell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for British Columbia. The most they could extract from the gathering was a promise that the Indians⁴⁶ would go back on Sunday night, if the strike was not settled. A union-sponsored meeting in Steveston on the same day had already succeeded in rallying the chiefs to persuade the Indians who were fishing to put up their nets and to stop any further back-to-work⁴⁷ movement.

⁴³ News-Advertiser, July 25, 1900, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., July 29, 1900, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Province, July 26, 1900, p. 1; July 27, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., July 27, 1900, p. 6.

⁴⁷ News-Advertiser, July 28, 1900, p. 5.

At the same time the New Westminster union followed the Vancouver group in undertaking independent negotiations with the canners. The initiative in setting the 25-cent demand had not come from New Westminster--and indications are that that union would have been satisfied with 20 cents.⁴⁸ In fact, in the first few days of the season when the strike was not being enforced, three officers of the New Westminster union were reported in the New Westminster newspaper, without denial by them, to be fishing for the 20 cent opening price.⁴⁹ During negotiations with the canners, the New Westminster delegates had been responsible for the committee's putting to the canners a proposal for a straight 20 cents throughout the season.⁵⁰

In this crucial week, signs multiplied that the New Westminster fishermen were preparing to act on their own. They were reported to be "resentful" of the too active part taken by agitators who had no connection with the fisheries, an indication of dissatisfaction with the Steveston radicals.⁵¹ On Thursday, July 26, the leaders of the union met with certain New Westminster businessmen and were reported, as a consequence, to be going to use

⁴⁸ World, July 12, 1900, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Columbian, July 12, 1900, p. 4. They could, of course, have been fishing with spring salmon nets, which was permitted by the strikers.

⁵⁰ See Chapter IV, pp. 125, 126 above.

⁵¹ Columbian, July 28, 1900, p. 2.

their influence to end the strike. On the following afternoon⁵³ the union met, presumably to formulate its proposals, and called another meeting for Saturday in preparation for voting on the offer they hoped to get. Saturday morning, with Bremner to smooth the way, a delegation met the Executive Committee of the Cannery Association. Again, what exact proposal they put to the cannery is not clear, but it was apparently for a straight 20 cents and union recognition (that afternoon Rogers reported this as their position). But the cannery were no more ready to make concessions to the "moderates" than they were to the "agitators" and the delegation had only a letter to carry back to their members, not addressed to them but to Bremner, repeating the offer from which the cannery refused to budge. The "moderates" were left to take what satisfaction they could from the letter's recognition, by actual mention of the union's name, of the⁵⁴ existence of their organization.

With the leadership of the parent unions in Vancouver and New Westminster wavering towards acceptance of the cannery's terms, Steveston's determined leaders, backed by a core of die-hard strikers, became the heart of the resistance to ending the strike in capitulation. Around them gathered, with their followers, those leaders from other centres on the lower river who also desired to

52 Columbian, July 27, 1900, p. 4.

53 World, July 28, 1900, p. 1.

54 News-Advertiser, July 29, 1900, p. 8.

continue the struggle. In the meetings of the week of crisis, the names of spokesmen of the North Arm fishermen, and of those from Ladner's Landing and Canoe Pass, and of the men who had left Vancouver, appear with increasing frequency, as the militants drew together in self-defense.

If, in the eyes of the strikers, Steveston alone represented the will to win, even Steveston could not win without at least carrying with it the rest of the fishermen. At this point, the canners might still have beaten the militants; at least a partial recognition of the Vancouver and New Westminster "moderates" might have produced an acceptance of more "reasonable" terms on price. While it is characteristic of the canners that they made no such attempt, if indeed the idea even occurred to them, the next moves by the Steveston leadership were aimed at forestalling this possibility by rallying all the remaining strikers in a new attempt at settlement.

The prime need was for the re-establishment of a common front on price and other demands and the revival of the negotiating committee, representing as many areas and groups as possible and prepared to take revised demands into fresh negotiations with the canners. Fortunately for the success of the attempt to revise the demands, the main obstacle to agreement lay in Steveston itself, which was still formally committed to 25 cents, a price which had been abandoned by Vancouver and New Westminster and was generally conceded to be virtually impossible of realization.

Apparently Rogers felt that some of the support for this extreme position came from men who really did not care whether they fished or not that season. The charge had been made frequently enough during the strike that some of the strikers were "dyke" fishermen--hangers-on who had no intention of going fishing and were only out to stir up trouble. These charges had admittedly been made by hostile sources, but the general tightening up of admissions to the last few meetings of the strike lends substance to this view. Union spokesmen also complained about "leaks" from their meetings,⁵⁵ but since the correspondent of the News-Advertiser was permitted to make very full reports even of the closed meetings, secrecy could hardly have been the chief end of the exclusions. In any case, Rogers announced that only holders of fishing licenses or boat pullers permits would be admitted to the meetings scheduled for Saturday. Protests about this requirement from men without either (fishermen in cannery boats did not need their own licenses), resulted in the setting up of an invigilating committee to screen⁵⁶ those seeking admission.

Out of the two meetings held at Steveston on Saturday emerged altered price demands and a committee to take them to the canners. These decisions bore a strong imprint of Rogers' personal leadership. In the morning meeting, he announced that, to counteract

⁵⁵ World, July 24, 1900, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Province, July 27, 1900, p. 6; News-Advertiser, July 28, p. 5.

the impression abroad that all offers had come from the canners, the afternoon meeting would be asked to approve a counter-offer to
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be presented to the canners. In the afternoon meeting, where he fought skillfully for the adoption as a counter-offer of 20 cents throughout the season, Rogers "laid it on the line" to a gathering of over 500 men who packed the Steveston Opera House to the point
58
of suffocation. He reviewed frankly, and fairly, the actions taken by Vancouver and New Westminster. He then turned, with a concern he had already expressed in several previous speeches that week, to the plight of the Indians in the coming winter if they lost the season. Later in the meeting, during expressions of opinion from representatives of the various "branches,"
59
when the irreconcilables balked at the advice of the chairman of the meeting, John Gilmour of North Arm, to accept "a reasonable offer," Rogers again took the floor. In a convincing demonstration of his mastery of the gathering, he flatly told the hostile elements that he personally had advised the acceptance of 20 cents at the beginning of the strike, but had been outvoted in the Vancouver meeting that

57 News-Advertiser, July 29, 1900, p. 4.

58 Ibid. The accounts of this meeting are taken solely from the News-Advertiser as only that paper's correspondent was admitted to the meeting. The union felt that the newspapers, especially the Vancouver Province and the New Westminster Columbian, had reported their activities unfairly and tried to impose boycotts on them (Columbian, July 25, 1900, p. 1; Province, July 31, 1900, p. 1).

59 This is the first mention of "branches" and indicates how quickly the budding locals burgeoned in the forcing bed of the strike.

had decided on 25 cents. Finally, Rogers fought off the intervention of Bremner, who arrived late, coming directly from the morning meeting of the canners' executive and the New Westminster delegation, with a copy of the letter to New Westminster repeating the 20-15 cents offer. When Bremner, after reading the letter, argued that the "last notch" had been reached and that it was "useless to expect another concession," Rogers brushed him aside and, the propitious moment having arrived, proposed a counter-offer of a straight 20 cents and recognition of the union. In spite of Bremner's pleas, the fishermen rejected the canners' offer with "a sea of sun-burned hands." The meeting then unanimously endorsed Rogers' proposal and voted to dispatch Bremner with a delegation to present it, naming to the delegation representatives of Steveston, Canoe Pass, North Arm, Ladner's Landing, and Vancouver.

The scene was now set for what proved to be the final round of negotiations. On Saturday evening the two sides met, but the deadlock remained as each contending party confined itself to stating its present position--the canners still for 20 and 15 cents, the fishermen now for a straight 20 cents. After this failure, another outside mediator was sought in the person of Francis Carter-Cotton, publisher of the News-Advertiser, who said he had been asked to act by both canners and fishermen. As a prominent member of the Vancouver Board of Trade and a former provincial cabinet minister,

⁶⁰ Province, July 30, 1900, p. 3.

Carter-Cotton was acceptable to the canners, and his recent "flirtation" with labor--he had sought trade union support in an unsuccessful bid⁶¹ for re-election in the June provincial election--no doubt reconciled the fishermen's committee to him.

All the final negotiations took place in Steveston. Carter-Cotton came there on Sunday morning bringing with him Dr. Duncan Bell-Irving and William Farrell of the Executive Committee of the Canners' Association. He first had a meeting with Bremner and the union committee. Then the two sides met again. This meeting was a repetition of the first one, with the canners' representatives refusing to budge either on prices or on union recognition. In apparent desperation, the union committee now suggested that it would make the canners an offer of 19 cents throughout the season. Even then, the canners reserved their decision, but offered enough encouragement that the session ended with the union committee⁶² preparing to call a meeting to ratify their proposal to the canners.

On Sunday night a tense crowd gathered. Reports of the lack of progress at the Saturday and Sunday conferences had spread among the strikers, and the new fishing week was already under way as they met. Rogers, as chairman of the committee, put what he said was the "final" report before the meeting. The committee

⁶¹ Independent, June 9, 1900, pp. 1, 5.

⁶² Province, July 30, 1900, p. 3; News-Advertiser, July 31, p. 3.

asked the meeting to ratify the compromise proposal, Rogers stressing that it was a "better proposition" than the one received by the Japanese, and that the whites and Indians would not be going back for the same rates as the Japanese.⁶³ Both Rogers and Gilmour argued that the offer should be accepted so the union could be held together. After speeches in support of the compromise by Carter-Cotton and Bremner, the committee's action was endorsed by a majority of three to one and presented to the canners in a letter addressed by⁶⁴ the union to Bremner.

On Monday morning, the full Executive Committee of the Fraser River Canners' Association met at Steveston to consider their position. Back to Bremner came a letter, containing their resolution, and worded in such a way as not to acknowledge the existence of the union. "As some fishermen prefer one price for the season," so ran the resolution, the canners were prepared to offer 19 cents throughout the season as an alternative to the terms in their offer of 20 and 15 cents. Concessions previously made, on accepting equal deliveries from all boats when limits were necessary, and on taking all the fish that could be processed, were re-affirmed. Fishermen had to specify, before their first delivery after the date of the

63 On weekly deliveries up to 725 fish, fishermen on the canners' rate of 20 cents for the first 600 fish a week and 15 cents after that, would receive a larger return. On deliveries over 725 fish, those on the straight 19 cents now proposed by the fishermen would get the higher return. It was a gamble in a speculative industry, likely to appeal especially to "high-line" fishermen. Later in the season, fishermen on the straight 19 cents were reported to be "reaping the benefits" because of heavier than expected catches (Columbian, Aug. 13, 1900, p. 1).

64 News-Advertiser, July 31, 1900, p. 3.

resolution, which rate they preferred. Mr. Bremner was graciously thanked for his services and told he was "at liberty to communicate the resolutions to the fishermen."⁶⁵

Though union spokesmen tried to soften the defeat on union recognition by claiming that the canners had, in fact, recognized the union by meeting with its elected committee, the way in which the final settlement was arranged makes it clear that the Canners' Association was not prepared to give any formal recognition whatsoever to the union. Yet, though their long ordeal was over, and many of them were dead-broke and even hungry, the union fishermen refused to be stampeded into an individual return to work. In a last display of the discipline and loyalty to their organization that had brought them to a negotiated settlement, they continued the strike until they had received and approved the canners' resolution at a meeting on Monday evening. Only then did they vote to return to work at 6 a.m. Tuesday. In a final act, they elected Frank Rogers president of the union and chose Will MacClain as secretary. With this testimony to the rank-and-file fisherman's estimate of the leadership of these two men, and with an ovation for Rogers, and for MacClain "and his popular wife,"⁶⁶ the fishermen dispersed. The great Fraser River salmon fishermen's strike of 1900 was at an end.

⁶⁵ News-Advertiser, July 31, 1900, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Independent, Aug. 4, 1900, p. 4.

CHAPTER VI

THE 1900 STRIKE AND THE CRISIS OF THE INDUSTRY

Did the fishermen win the strike? On the evidence presented it would appear that they did. The strikers forced the canners to retreat from their initial refusal to set any minimum price, first to offering a minimum of 15 cents, and finally to agreeing to a minimum of 19 cents for the season. In addition to negotiating a floor price, the fishermen won other important concessions on deliveries. Previous discrimination against individual fishermen was ended. All fish were now to be taken up to the capacity of the cannery, and when that capacity was reached, limits on deliveries were to be applied equally to all boats fishing for the cannery, whether on shares or contracts.

What the fishermen failed to gain was any formal recognition of their union. Nor did they get even the substance of that recognition, an agreement signed with the canners. Nevertheless they had forced the canners to negotiate, and though the price settlement was still cast in the old form, it represented, in fact, something entirely new, a single price for a whole season, arrived at by negotiation.

Though they failed to attain their goal of immediate recognition of their union, the fishermen had still won a real victory. They had created, in the face of considerable odds, a

union organization and sustained it in the severest of tests. At the end of the strike they were in an excellent position to build on their experience in perfecting the structure of the union for the coming year, and this task they undertook with the confidence born of their very substantial achievements in 1900. The product of this enthusiasm was the first coast-wide fishermen's union composed of locals from Canoe Pass in the south to Port Simpson in the north and including the main centres of Fraser River fishermen--Vancouver, New Westminster, Steveston, Eburne--as well as a local among the Cowichan Indians. The organization of this Grand Lodge of British Columbia Fishermen's Unions began in September, 1900, immediately after the fishing season, and was completed well before the season of 1901, during which it was strong enough to lead another strike on the Fraser River.¹

Taking the longer view, the 1900 strike also marked the beginning of unionism in the fishing industry of British Columbia. Individual unions might merge or dissolve; new organizations might be born and be replaced in their turn; at times the majority of fishermen might not even be in any union; but from that time forward, a continuous thread of trade union activity can be traced through the story of the industry. The early ideal set by the first fishermen's unions--one organization for all fishermen on the British Columbia coast--was not even to be approached for many

¹ Independent, Sept. 1, 1900, p. 1; Gladstone, "Industrial Disputes in the Commercial Fisheries of British Columbia," pp. 145-150.

decades, and then only by a union also enrolling shoreworkers, a development not foreseen by the pioneers of unionism. But the goal of one all-inclusive fishermen's union was first envisaged during the 1900 strike.

The immediate effect of the strike, however, was to deepen the crisis of over-expansion already being suffered by the Fraser River salmon canning industry. Over-expansion had occurred in the capital structure and manufacturing capacity of the industry as well as in the number of fishing licenses issued. A rush of poorly-financed newcomers, attracted by reports of large profits, had swollen the ranks of canning companies with a number of financially-weak firms, dependent on the banks for operating capital and able to survive only in a succession of good years. The difficulties of the seasons of 1898 and 1899, difficulties which had created the combine, were added to by the events of the season of 1900. The length of the strike reduced the season's pack, which would have in any case been relatively small, to the lowest figure since 1892, the year in which license limitation was ended. This pack, moreover, had to be shared among nearly three² times as many canneries as in 1892.

The new method of setting prices contributed to this crisis. The establishment of a season's minimum price for 1900 meant a high cost for the fish that the canneries were able to pack in that year. The setting of a minimum price again in 1901,

² See above, Table I, p. 2.

after another strike, prevented the canners from recouping any loss suffered in the previous season by packing low-cost fish as they would usually have done in a big year. The dramatic change in prices can best be seen by a comparison with the cycle year immediately preceding. In 1900, prices were 19 cents or 20 and 15 cents throughout the season; in 1896 they had dropped from 25 cents at the season's opening to five and ten cents in the heavy run. In 1901, the minimum price was 10 cents; in 1897, the opening price was also 10 cents, but it went as low as two cents with no takers in the heaviest part of the run.³ The sheer volume of fish also complicated the price problem in 1901. Nearly one million cases of sockeye were canned. Canneries strained their credit to the breaking point to pay for the putting up of a large pack and then faced a long carry-over period before the market could absorb the huge supply on hand.

The resolution of this crisis of over-expansion--and it must be emphasized that what follows is tentative and requires to be tested by further research--seems to have proceeded along three lines: mergers by companies, changes in technology, and amendments to fishery regulations. Each one of these trends altered the conditions that had favored the growth of a militant fishermen's union and their cumulative effect was the disappearance not only of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia Fishermen's Unions, but also its

3 Gladstone, "Industrial Disputes in the Commercial Fisheries of British Columbia," p. 150; also see Chapter II, p. 68 above.

Vancouver component, and later, of the pioneer local in New Westminster.

Company merger was the instrument closest to the hand of the cannerymen, and it promised good results in the increased efficiency of a unified management, in savings through large-scale purchases, and in economies in production, all of which would make the industry more profitable by reducing costs per case of canned salmon. Plans for a cannery combine had often been proposed prior to this date, but had always been defeated by the reluctance of one section or other of the cannery operators. At the end of the season of 1901, however, most cannerymen, because of the problems of the past few years, had neither cash nor credit, and were in no position to hold out against a merger plan. Decisive in the combine proposal of 1902 was the support of the banks which financed the industry. In the interests of protecting their current advances and improving their security in future transactions, two of the leading banks, the Bank of Montreal and the Canadian Bank of Commerce, backed the scheme. The objective was to buy out all the existing canneries in the province. As it turned out, the new combine, the British Columbia Packers' Association, was not able to achieve this aim, but did acquire on the Fraser River alone 29 of the 48 plants, as well as 12 in northern waters.

⁴ Doyle, "Pacific Salmon Fisheries," vol. 1, pp. 211 et seq.; Cobb, Pacific Salmon Fisheries, p. 472.

Some of the immediate savings which served to improve profit margins can easily be seen. The number of canneries operating on the Fraser River shrank to 23 in 1904 as the new organization began large-scale production in a few of the most efficient plants. The steady rise of fish prices over the past decade was also reversed. Though strikes, apparently unsuccessful,^{4a} were reported in both 1902 and 1903, prices in both years were lower than in the previous corresponding cycle years of 1898 and 1899. In 1903, prices averaged only 14 cents, as compared with⁵ an average 25 cents in 1899.

Technological changes, though not initiated by the British Columbia canning industry, were another means of reducing costs and thus increasing the spread between cost and selling prices. The biggest step towards mechanization in the canneries was the introduction some time after 1903 of the "Iron Chink"--a machine that gutted the fish and cut off their heads and tails, doing away with the large butchering gang and performing the work at many times the speed of hand labor. Also brought into general use were the automatic can-filling machines which eliminated another big crew⁶ of hand laborers.

Company merger and technological change altered the

^{4a} Independent, Oct. 18, 1902, p. 1; July 4, 1903, p. 1.

⁵ Canada, Dominion Fisheries Commission for British Columbia, 1905-07, Report and Recommendations, Ottawa, Government Printing Bureau, 1908, pp. 22-3.

⁶ Gladstone, "Industrial Disputes in the Commercial Fisheries of British Columbia," pp. 33-4.

situation that produced strikes in every season from 1900 to 1903 by allowing payment of higher fish prices while maintaining the profit margins of the canneries. Legislative action worked in a different way towards the same end. It had the effect of disarming the vocal section of the fishermen--the so-called white resident group--by promising to secure to them a disproportionate share of the total returns to fishermen. No fewer than three federal Royal Commissions were created in the years 1902 to 1905 to suggest remedies for one or other aspects of the problems of the white fishermen. The British Columbia Salmon Commission of 1902 did not make any final report or recommendations, but its successor, the Dominion Fisheries Commission for British Columbia, 1905-1907, recommended an entirely new set of fishery regulations with many features designed to benefit this particular group. The Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration of 1902 considered ways to mitigate the effects on white fishermen of the competition of the Japanese. The specific recommendations of these bodies are not as important in this discussion as their effect in opening up again to the fishermen a channel, other than strike action, for expressing their grievances.

7 Canada, S.P., 1903, no. 22, pp. xi-xiv.

8 Canada, Fisheries Commission, 1905-07, Report, pp. 80-86.

9 Canada, S.P., 1903, no. 54, passim.

Probably a minority of fishermen had always supported lobbying to restrict their competitors in preference to any form of militant trade union action. As defeats for the latter policy multiplied, their numbers were undoubtedly swelled and their hopes revived by the setting up of the Royal Commissions. Significantly in this connection, the New Westminster local, which had arisen out of just such a pressure group, survived, at least for a time,¹⁰ the dissolution of its more militant counterparts.

In these altered conditions, the Grand Lodge of British Columbia Fishermen's Unions did not hold together for long. Gladstone and Jamieson place its demise as early as 1902,¹¹ but it seems to have existed at least until the resignation of its secretary, Charles Durham, in the spring of 1903.¹² In any case, it probably did not outlast the defeat of the strike in that year.¹³ Whatever the exact circumstances of its dissolution, the ideal of a coast-wide union open to all ethnic groups and militant in its approach to price negotiations, was apparently not firmly enough established to endure the unfavorable change in climate.

10 Gladstone and Jamieson, "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia," CJEPS, vol. 16 (May 1950), p. 148 (Table I).

11 Ibid.

12 Independent, March 23, 1903, p. 3.

13 The Labor Day issue of the Independent mentions a New Westminster fishermen's union, but lists neither the Grand Lodge nor the Vancouver local (Sept. 5, 1903, p. 1).

One final point: if the hypothesis that radical ideology arises out of industrial conflict has any validity, a waning of socialist influence might be expected in changed conditions in which a militant ideology was of less relevance. The radical leaders of the 1900 strike do indeed seem to have drifted away from the fishermen's union. MacClain drops out of sight almost immediately after the 1900 strike. Rogers, at the time of his murder in 1903, was said not to have been associated with the union after the 1901 strike.¹⁴ Only Ernest Burns continues his connection in 1902. At the founding convention of the Provincial Progressive Party in April, 1902, though he went as a representative of the Vancouver Socialist Party, he is referred to as president of the Fishermen's Union.¹⁵ Present evidence is, however, too slender to justify even a tentative conclusion concerning the role of socialists in the fishermen's unions after 1900.

¹⁴ Independent, April 18, 1903, p. 1.

¹⁵ Loosmore, "The British Columbia Labor Movement," p. 164 and Appendices, p. xxvi. Burns was probably only president of the Vancouver local, not of the Grand Lodge. He is listed as president in Vancouver local's standing advertisement until February, 1902 (Independent, Feb. 23, 1902, p. 5).

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