Class Formation and Class Consciousness: The Making of Shoreworkers in the BC Fishing Industry

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Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* renewed interest in marxist studies of the labour process and the nature of the proletariat and its potential in class struggle. While at times the magnitude of Braverman's achievement got lost in the ensuing debate, it was nonetheless
inevitable that his study would show the effects of decades of neglect. Braverman concentrated on the objective conditions of class formation; in particular, on the deskilling of the craft worker. Using the analogy of an inverted pyramid, Braverman pictured the economy as resting upon an increasingly narrow base of knowledge and productive work, "of useful labor". This is valid if one focuses on skilled craft workers in relation to the capitalist class. It disappears when the rest of the working class is introduced into the analysis.

The base has always rested on the large mass of labour performed by all members of society, and not always given economic value in the marketplace. Craft workers themselves formed the apex of a proletarian pyramid. The process of monopoly capitalism has involved the appropriation of the basis upon which those workers enjoyed their status. Thus stripped, they sink to the massive base of the pyramid, the members of which are increasingly brought into the economic marketplace as consumers and paid wage labourers. A social evolution does occur, but it affects the mass of labourers very differently from the minority of skilled workers, although their final condition is, as Braverman documents, similar. Furthermore, when this base is brought into view, important questions glossed over by Braverman, most notably those of gender and race, acquire new prominence. Although Braverman devoted a portion of his study to the increasing employment of women in clerical and service occupations, he did not direct attention to the differential experience of gender and race when these structure employment opportunities. Those people whose gender and/or race allows them access only to labour at the cheapest wages, face specific work experiences, histories of employment, and, finally, strategies of struggle. The last point is connected to a further criticism pertinent to the present study. Braverman stated at the outset of his book that he was concerned only with the objective conditions of class, of a "class-in-itself", and not with the subjective conditions of class consciousness, or "class-for-itself". Amongst others, Burawoy, Coombs, and John and Barbara Ehrenreich have questioned making such a distinction.

This paper attempts to further our understanding of the labour process and class formation by looking at the 'mass' of labourers in the BC fishing industry, the impacts on the labour
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process of gender and racial distinctions and how these were modified by workers' struggles historically. As Braverman himself noted somewhat presciently: "The problem can be fruitfully attacked, it seems to me, only by way of concrete and historically specific analysis of technology and machinery on the one side and social relations on the other, and of the manner in which these two come together in existing societies."7

Labourers in the BC fishing industry provide a fascinating case study because they incorporate the two groups identified: craft workers or fishers and a small shore sector of skilled men who became important in the industry following (and not prior to) its development; and, factory or shore workers recruited according to distinctions based upon race and gender. The last hundred years, identified by Braverman as the era of monopoly capitalism, coincide with the capitalist penetration of the BC fisheries, with the establishment of a salmon canning industry on the Fraser River in the 1870s.

The factory workers recruited to work in the canneries were not a ready-made labour force. The introduction of capital in the form of canneries entailed a search for workers to labour inside them. The population of British Columbia was small, except for the people native to the province. White men had been lured by the promise of gold, and tended to labour on their own account as independent commodity producers. The population of white men was minuscule. The canners therefore turned to Chinese labourers who had first come to the province to work in the mines. While a number worked for themselves, a significant proportion was hired to work as general labourers by the large mine owners. Their wages were significantly lower than those of white miners who performed the skilled or craft work. The second population to which the canners turned was the native peoples. Not only did canners hire native fishers, but the great advantage in hiring them was that they brought their families to the canneries for the duration of the fishing season. The women and children were thus available to work inside the plants.

Although shoreworkers were a working class through their labour, they were not treated as such by canners. Under the Chinese contract system, in fact, they were not even paid by their employer but through an intermediary. And, because factory work was seasonal, the transformation to total dependency
on wage labour for survival was only partially realized, especially for native labourers. To this date, the process remains incomplete, especially for women shoreworkers. However, it has become more fully developed through union organization. While the union was established from outside the shore plants, by fishers seeking to create an industrial union, class consciousness had to be developed from within by the workers themselves. This paper traces these twin forces of class formation and class consciousness among BC shoreworkers. Their struggles — from the establishment of a provincial capitalist fishing industry in the latter part of the nineteenth century to the first general strike in 1959 — are documented in an effort to trace through the process of proletarianization for a group of workers.

Creation of a Labour Force (1871-1905) We must have cheap labour or we cannot sell cheap goods. Capitalist penetration of the BC fisheries reflected a wider movement of capital into new industries. Several developments in the world economy were important for the timing of this particular encroachment. In the 1880s and 1890s, capital in the United States was reorganized into corporations around a new marketing approach. Transportation and food industries were the first arenas for these giant corporations. Food and transportation were, in turn, linked to the growth of large urban centers in which food could not be grown, and thus had to be transported from food-producing areas often located thousands of kilometers from these cities. However, since food can be highly perishable, technological innovations were crucial.

In general, the industrialization of the food industry provided the indispensable basis of the type of urban life that was being created; and it was in the food industry that the marketing structure of the corporation ... became fully developed. The canning industry had come into being in the 1840s with the development of stamping and forming machinery for producing tin cans on a mass basis. The expansion of this industry to embrace national and international markets did not come, however, until the 1870s, when further technical developments, including rotary pressure cookers and automatic soldering of cans — not to speak of the development of rail and sea transport — made it possible.

One of the conditions under which British Columbia consented to join Confederation in 1871, was the Dominion government's promise to construct a rail system, within ten years, uniting the Atlantic and Pacific seabords. In that same year,
the Department of Marine and Fisheries undertook the regulation of the BC fisheries, but observers sent to the distant province reported that these were little developed. "In speaking of the fisheries of British Columbia, one may almost be said to be speaking of something which has no existence. With the exception of a small attempt at putting up salmon in tins on the Fraser River, and one or two whaling enterprises of a few years' standing, no attempt whatever has been made to develop [sic] the actually marvelous resources of this Province in the way of fish.”  

A little more than thirty years later, British Columbia was the top fish-producing province in Canada, with an estimated fish catch valued at $9,850,216. Salmon was the most highly valued fish in the Dominion, at $8,989,942; the great majority of it canned in British Columbia.

Prior to canning, salmon had been exported as a dried salted product in barrels, with the Hudson Bay Company as the major entrepreneur. The fish was procured by barter from native fishers, and the industry does not appear to have seriously disrupted the native economy. However, the demand for fish in this condition was limited to marine crews stationed in the Sandwich Islands and Australia. As regards the canned product, "The market for this article ... depends intimately upon the condition of the manufacturing and mining classes in Great Britain and elsewhere, affording to them, as it does, in a convenient form, a very acceptable change from the uniformity of their ordinary diet.”

Salmon canning was intensively prosecuted originally on the Columbia River. When the salmon supply there became exhausted, there was a search for new areas, principally in Alaska and British Columbia. Existing technology lay the foundation upon which the provincial canning industry was built. A number of machines had been successfully introduced, and the labour process, from the landing of the fish at the dock to its shipment from the cannery in boxed tins, was that of an assembly line. Never were labourers individually given the entire task of processing the fish from start to finish. "It is of course only by an organized system of action and the minute subdivision of labour that the operations of the industry, from the cutting up of the tin plates, the shaping, the soldering up to the final labelling of the cans, after the insertion and cooking of the contents, can be profitably carried on.”

Machinery was intro-
duced at various points on the assembly line, the chief manual jobs occurring at the start in the preparation of the fish, and in the making of the tin cans. Clearly, an enterprise of this kind required a large labour force. The problem was finding a sufficient number of workers.

In the census of 1871, the native population was estimated at between thirty-five and forty thousand people. In addition, there were 8516 whites, 462 "negroes" and 1548 Chinese, totaling 10,586; of which, 7574 were men and 3012 were women. The previous year, Governor Musgrave requested an appropriation of $5000 for the promotion of immigration in order to assist the introduction of female immigrants to the province. Attempts were also made to have children brought in as labourers from England. "British Columbia is much in want of a class of beings much too numerous in England, that is boys and girls, say from ten or eight to fifteen years old for help on the farms and in the cities. What I desire is to have a lot of these children sent out from England from among disease, filth and immorality, to good, healthy frugal homes in this beautiful clime." It was further suggested (and approved by the Minister of Agriculture) that the expenditures incurred in transporting these children could be deducted from their wages.

A member of Parliament for British Columbia attributed the employment of Chinese men to the scarcity of female white labour. Senator MacDonald noted that if the same number of women were available in British Columbia as lived in Ontario, "they would do all that kind of light work, and then, of course, I would be in favour of doing away with Chinese labour altogether." He went on to note that the price of white male labour in British Columbia was too high because these men came to the province in search of gold at a time when money was plentiful and labour scarce: "where labour is cheap, advantage will be taken of the circumstance, no matter by whom it is furnished, whether by black or by white — no matter what the colour of the employees may be."

The rationale for hiring labour at cheap wages was given primarily in racial terms. In the early 1870s, most of the Chinese in the province were miners. The Superintendent of the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company (Limited) noted that when the Chinese came his company was suffering from a
strike by the white labourers, "and we accepted the Chinese as a weapon with which to settle the dispute. With a little more trouble we might, I think, have obtained Indians to answer our purpose equally well." While approximately 400 white labourers received no less than $2 per day, the labour force of some 150 Chinese men was paid from $1 to $1.25 per day. Dunsmuir, the proprietor of the Wellington mines, testified that the Chinese performed the manual labour that white men refused to do. "White men decline to do the work given to the Chinese, and could not live in this country at the present prices of products on the wages paid the Chinamen."\(^{19}\)

The canners recruited these men. However, the need of capital for cheap labour clashed with a growing racist among the white population, resulting in a Royal Commission inquiry on immigration into British Columbia. It was charged that the "presence of this semi-slave labour is most prejudicial to the best interests of the country."\(^{20}\) White workers expressed the fear that low wages would depress the entire wage scale of the provincial economy, thus keeping white workers from entering the province. Against this argument, Commissioner Gray concluded that, with the exception of 130 Chinese men employed as boot-makers in Victoria, Chinese labour in no way interfered with skilled labour. "They are made, so far as provincial legislation can go, perpetual aliens, and with the Indians are by positive terms denied the political and municipal franchises attached to property and person, conceded to other British subjects, born or naturalized, when of sufficient age to exercise them."\(^{21}\) Without Chinese labourers, several industries would not only not have succeeded, but possibly might not even have been started. The canned salmon industry was given as an example.

White workers generally accepted racist ideology in order to preserve their own gains. They looked at the material conditions of these workers and sought to prevent their own standards from falling by organizing on the basis of race. It took decades of organization to eradicate this racist ideology among shoreworkers. It was not so much that the white working class was innately prejudiced, but that employers structured the labour force along racial (and also gender) lines, and structured benefits accordingly. Thus, each group was made to feel it had something to gain from this type of structure.
New Westminster of the Fraser River, circa 1883, had a population of about three hundred permanent Chinese settlers. During the salmon fishing season, this population swelled to between twelve and fifteen hundred. The Chinese labourers were recruited in Oregon, Washington, California and Victoria for the inside labour required in the canneries, staying from two to three months. Each cannery contracted with a Chinese agent who hired the entire plant labour force. Native people were also hired by contracts, while the few white skilled labourers and supervisors were hired directly by the canners. In their 1885 report, the commissioners concluded: "It is fortunate that, in a young and sparsely settled Province, this cheap labor can be obtained, for it enables those whose minds are capable of higher development, and whose ambition looks to more ennobling industry — to follow pursuits in which they will rise — rather than toil and slave in groveling work, which wears out the body without elevating the mind."

But it did more than this, the commissioners concluded. It enabled the capitalist to bring money into the province and to employ it in fixed rather than labour inputs. "The evidence shows most distinctly that the price of white labor of the lowest kind is at such a figure that he cannot use his capital to advantage and with safety, while with the prices charged by the Chinese for similar labour, he can."

A further advantage in hiring Chinese stemmed from the shortness of the canning season. Workers were only required for two or three months. However, during the height of the run, which might last from seven to nine days, they had to work around the clock. This problem was solved by the use of Chinese contractors. Methods of payment varied, but, as a general rule, they were paid by the case. Chinese contractors, operating out of Victoria, often furnished the entire non-white labour force (sometimes using native contractors to recruit native women and children) and arranged for the provisioning of the Chinese crew. The canners paid the contractors, not the labourers. Contractors often made up for a bad season by cutting back on food and services supplied to the men. During the rest of the year, the contractors found employment for the Chinese in other industries (for example, domestic workers or cooks). A "China boss" supervised the cannery crews, thus increasing the dependence of the men on the contractors.
Initial dependence was created when contractors recruited workers in China, paying their passage to North America. Most of the Chinese intended to return to China, since their families stayed behind. They hoped to return with small fortunes, but, in the meantime, had to pay back the contractors. In this way they were drawn into wage labour, but were only partially proletarianized. They could not offer their labour power independently to a capitalist employer but were forced to do so through a middleman. Furthermore, it was in the interests of the contractors to perpetuate dependency, and they established a cycle of continuing indebtedness, preventing workers from ever being in the position of returning to China. This is an instance of a precapitalist relation of production being used within a capitalist mode of production. It was not in the interests of capitalists, in this particular case, to create a proletarianized working class. It was much cheaper for them to recruit workers on a basis other than individual wages. Although other forces interfered and prevented them from being totally reliant on this method, today the contract system is still in use, in a modified form. However, in the 1940s, its structure as the primary method of recruitment was replaced by negotiated collective agreements.\textsuperscript{25} The contract system could work well only if there continued a cheap and abundant labour force dependent on contractors for work.

The contract price per case has decreased. The price now is cheaper than formerly. In the ordinary work the machine has taken the place of the ordinary work and the men employed in these places are experts in their lines. There is a competition among the cannery contractors to get the experts, which has a tendency to raise the wages... The wages paid to Chinese ten years ago in the cannery business was much less than now. (Mar Chan, Chinese contractor)\textsuperscript{26}

With the scarcity of Chinese labourers around 1881 due to the building of the railway, mechanization was intensified.\textsuperscript{27} The adoption of several "labor-saving contrivances" in some of the Fraser River canneries resulted in an estimated thirty percent reduction in the cost of manipulating the cans.\textsuperscript{28} In describing the machinery in use, the Fishery Inspector noted a "travelling platform worked by an endless chain". The conveyor belt, an extremely primitive type of machine, was, as Braverman emphasized in his study, of central importance in fragmenting the labour process into boring and repetitive tasks. With management controlling the pace and individual...
workers assigned to each task, the entire product could be processed much more quickly than an individual worker could undertake the entire job alone. Onto this assembly line of workers, machines were added as the technology to mechanize portions of the process was discovered. For example, in 1881 retorts and soldering machines were introduced. By the turn of the century, work requiring three to four hundred men a decade earlier could now be performed by one hundred and twenty.29

Mechanization didn't just reduce the total number of workers required: it also introduced the need for a skilled category of craft workers to tend the machines when in use and to overhaul them in preparation for each season, since machinery lay idle throughout the winter months. This was the beginning of the formation of a small but important sector of the plant labour force: white skilled machinemen.

There was never a time in this Province when white people were available for doing the labour inside the canneries. By the introduction of machinery we have had to employ more high class labour. It turns out the low class of oriental labour and brings in a high class of white labour to look after the machines . . . Under existing circumstances the canneries could not be carried on without oriental labour.30

Skill was now attached to machinery rather than to manual operations. Chinese men had developed expertise in several of the salmon canning operations; for example, butchering salmon, making cans, and detecting defectively filled cans simply by sound (by tapping each can with a nail). When the industry was new, these skills were developed by the workers hired for the job (Chinese workers did not bring these skills with them from other industries). However, as racism grew in the province, immigration of Chinese was curtailed. Chinese workers, originally recruited because of their availability and cheapness, were, by the turn of the century, skilled, scarce and could therefore command higher wages. But, rather than meeting their demands, canners mechanized the lines, displacing skilled Chinese workers and introducing skilled white machinemen.

At the turn of the century, of an estimated twenty thousand employed in the fisheries, half worked in the canneries. Of this number, an estimated six thousand were Chinese men working in 74 canneries (49 on the Fraser River), receiving from $35 to $45 per month. That they had become a scarce and skilled labour force is evident in the fact that canners extended the sea-
son for the most skilled Chinese workmen by hiring them to make the cans as well as process the fish, in spite of access to a can-making factory on the Fraser River (in New Westminster). The canners claimed they could make cans at least as cheaply as they could buy them. Can-makers were paid as much as $50 to $60 per month, with about thirty hired per cannery.\(^{31}\)

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

There is an ongoing debate among anthropologists dealing with the extent to which the salmon canning industry disrupted the native economy. A current view is that it was preserved since native people could incorporate work for the canners into their traditional economic cycle. Compared to other industries, perhaps, the impact was not as great since it did not destroy the original economy. However, it did transform it. Native fishers were forbidden by law to operate weirs (traps) when their fishing competed with supplies desired by the fishing companies. In addition, although native women had traditionally processed salmon, they had had greater control over their own labour, which was crucial to the survival of the group. Now they were hired by outsiders for wages and their labour was alienated. Whole villages were drawn into a capitalist economy, only to be pushed out of it once canneries were closed and relocated in or close to cities.

That northern groups were aware of the disruption and threat to their economies, and fought against it, is evident in the reports of fisheries officers in the 1870s. "The great impetus given to the establishment of salmon canneries this season excites much talk among the Indians of white people monopolizing their favourite fishing grounds."\(^{32}\) Increasingly, as canners expanded their operations and searched for new sources of supply, the native economy was disrupted because salmon was an essential part of the diet — not only of those tribes capturing it, but also of those inland who traded for the
salmon in a large network of exchange. Many native fishers began to fish for the canning companies. Canners tried to use these men as cheap sources of labour. In the initial period, while Japanese and European fishers bargained over fish prices, native fishers were hired for wages. Canners endeavoured to secure native fishers as a reserve, alternating between outside work on the grounds and inside work in the factories. However, this pattern was of short duration. Apart from working in the net lofts, men resisted employment on the canning lines. This was assigned to native women, children and, in times of heavy runs, the elderly.

Thus, while the labour of native fishers was diverted to work for canners, its nature remained unaltered, especially in the early period before the fishing fleet was mechanized (beginning with the conversion of boats from sail to engine power). However, the labour of native women was proletarianized. Traditionally, women processed the salmon, chiefly through drying and curing. Salmon was such an important item of trade that it was used by many tribes as a form of money.33 Women occupied an important place in economic exchange since they transformed the perishable fish into a durable article. The canners transformed the position of women when they hired them. Canners were predominantly of European origin, from a culture in which women occupied the lowest ranks in terms of wage labour. In the division of labour inside the canneries, native women (and their children) occupied the lowest positions. They were primarily employed washing fish and filling salmon tins (work they still perform today) for which they were paid piece rates. They were never guaranteed work for the season (unlike the Chinese) but were called in as needed. This was the great advantage of having entire villages relocate to the canneries during the fishing season, especially in the remote northern areas. Native women received the lowest wages. For example, in 1885, men working in the canneries averaged $30 per month while native women received an average of $13 (and native boys were paid $7 per month). Alexander Ewen, a pioneer canner on the Fraser River in the south, explained the strategy of the employers:

The real reason that you want to have those boats of your own and get Indian fishermen as they bring their families around and you have Indian women and boys, and some of the men, not fishermen, to work in the
canneries, and when this extra fishing comes on you can take off your own boats and get off to work in the cannery. There are not so many Chinamen as there were, and Indians, these last few years, are more pliable and will work in the cannery when they see there is a rush. Three or four years ago they would not do this, but now they are more pleased to work when they get more wages in the cannery, and they will work during that period when salmon is plentiful.34

To summarize, in establishing a capitalist fishing industry, canners had to actively create a factory labour force. Of the two groups recruited, the Chinese appear to have been preferable to native peoples. The contract system enabled employers to use a proletarianized labour force without treating it as such — without having to pay wages to individual workers. Chinese men were dependent for work not only on the canners, but also on Chinese contractors, who controlled their ability to return to China. In this way, the Chinese were far more dependent on wage labour than were native peoples, who could still turn to their native economy. It was not in the interests of canners to destroy that economy since they had no use for native labour once the fishing season ended. However, in only partially proletarianizing the native economy, they also guaranteed an alternative mode of production to which native wage labourers could return. Both labour forces were not ideally suited to the canners' purposes. Racist legislation and alternative work opportunities curtailed the availability of Chinese men, while natives had the option of leaving wage work if it did not suit their needs. Both groups, however, were judged superior to white male labour since they could be paid much less, and did not tend to strike. Ultimately, however, machinery would save the day, since machines "will make us independent of any particular class of labour."35

In 1903, and again in 1905, canners were forced to limit boat catches to two hundred salmon per boat at the height of the runs, because of the difficulty in obtaining enough inside labour. The bottleneck was overcome with the invention and introduction, around 1905, of the "Iron Chink" or Smith butchering machine. Two machine operators could now perform the work of fifty-one expert Chinese butchers.36 Up to that time, most of the machines had been introduced at the end of the assembly line. This led to bottlenecks at the start of the process since a large number of skilled workers were required to prepare the fish for these machines. The introduc-
tion of the "Iron Chink" transformed the line for a machine now controlled the first stages of the process: the butchering and cutting up of the fish. The speed of the line could be paced to the machine, and the entire line could be organized mechanically. The manual dexterity of skilled workmen was lost, and the entire process was now controlled by machines arranged at various points on the assembly line.

A few workers had become deskilled. But most had never been required to perform craft work such as existed, for example, in making land mending nets or fishing. The introduction of machines did require a few skilled mechanics and engineers. These positions were filled by white craft workers who formed a labour elite in the shore plants, receiving the highest wages and most secure working conditions. Most were hired on a permanent basis. Immigration laws were further tightened, effectively barring the entry of Chinese labourers. However, urban centers began to develop and the canners began to recruit women from them to work in the nearby canneries. Vancouver and Steveston were sources of female labour for the Fraser River canneries; Prince Rupert, for some of the northern plants; and Victoria, for Vancouver Island. These women, many of them Japanese, were recruited by the contractors. The racial arguments given by the canners to substantiate cheap wages were now reinforced by gender distinctions. They argued that women were supported by their husbands. While a man (that is, a white man) required a decent or "family" wage in order to sustain both himself and his family, a woman's economic needs differed. While she might require a wage to support herself until she married, once married all she needed was "pin" or pocket money. Race and gender distinctions were the two fundamental divisions used by canners to recruit cheap labour, with different jobs, and systems and rates of pay assigned to each grouping.

Organisation of a Labour Force (1941-1959) Until the 1930s, the wages and working conditions of shoreworkers had not improved substantially from those at the turn of the century. They worked short seasons, long hours, and continued to be paid as little as 15 cents per hour. Wages were arbitrarily set by the canners — there being no minimum wage act to protect workers. Their only recourse was the use of spontaneous
strikes when conditions became unbearable. Beginning in the latter half of the 1930s, strikes began to occur with increasing frequency, most organized by fishers in support of their demands for higher fish prices. When settled successfully, shoreworkers sometimes gained slight increases in their own wages. For the most part, however, such strikes were sporadic and resulted, at best, in temporary gains. Many were fought in order to attain parity with wages and conditions at nearby plants. They do, however, illustrate that shoreworkers were not a passive group. Nevertheless, as long as labour disturbances occurred in isolation, they posed little threat to the canners. If one cannery went out on strike, the salmon could be processed at another one. The same applied to fishers. If one group held out for higher prices, fish could be bought from other groups and processed in the plants. The canners' strength lay in their own united organization (the Salmon Canners' Operating Committee) and in the divisions prevalent in the industry, most of which they actively supported and many of which they had actually created. While shoreworkers were assigned tasks on the basis of gender and racial distinctions, fishers were also divided by racial distinctions, as well as by gear (for example, gillnetters, seiners and trollers).

Fishers were organized in strong craft unions dating back to the turn of the century. Beginning in the late 1930s, a number of these unions, organized by gear types, amalgamated. In 1937, they began a concerted organizational drive among shoreworkers. In 1941, the United Fishermen's Federal Union (UUFFU) created the Fish Cannery Reduction Plant and Allied Workers' Federal Union (Local 89). In 1945, the Trades and Labour Congress permitted fishers and shoreworkers to amalgamate into an industrial union: the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union (UFAWU). Negotiated collective agreements replaced the Chinese contract system in the plants. However, the structure of the labour force did not change. The discriminatory basis upon which it was based — that is, the hiring of cheap labour on the basis of race and gender — continued.

The history of trade union organization has centered around the class consciousness of one specific group of workers; those whose skills are indispensable to capitalist industry. Generally, these skills have been the preserve of a small group
of white male workers. The fishing industry does not differ in this respect. Fishers of European background were the most militant in striking against fishing companies for better fish prices. By the end of the depression, however, the trade union leaders concluded that as long as unionization followed the patterns of division established by the canners, the movement would go nowhere. They therefore decided to push for a provincial industrial union. This meant organizing shoreworkers. In fact, the shore plants were crucial in any successful fishers' strike. As long as canners could keep plants open by purchasing non-union fish, fishers could not wage successful strikes. But if the plants were unionized and shut, canners would be forced to negotiate. It proved easier to organize shoreworkers than to bring all fishers into one union. However, because unionization occurred from outside shoreworker ranks, the interests of fishers prevailed for many decades. It took two decades (until the 1959 general strike) before shoreworkers began to perceive themselves as trade unionists and to articulate demands, not only in support of fishers, but for themselves.

An important factor in this process was the political orientation of union leaders. They were Communist Party members, some of them fishers, but others brought in from other provincial industries. In the period under review, none came from shoreworker ranks (unlike the current President, Jack Nichol, who is a former shoreworker). However, from the beginning, their ideology was democratic. But to put democracy into practice required tearing down the structure erected by the canners; that is, the division of labour according to race and gender. It also required fighting the ingrained racism of many white fishers and shoreworkers — those who identified their material gains with their race. These battles are still being waged today but considerable progress has been made, especially in shore plants.

The structure of a hierarchy of labour determined by gender and race, with skilled machinemen at the apex, was adopted into the first union agreements for a number of reasons. One was the intent of the fishers in organizing shoreworkers. The initial concern was to organize all plants prior to organizing all workers. That is, rather than concentrating on certifying all workers, union leaders concentrated on key positions and thus
followed the discriminatory structure erected by canners. Most canneries established reduction plants, operations which were especially lucrative during the war years. Reduction plant workers were relatively few in number and predominantly white skilled males. The second target group was the cannery machinemen, a similar group also crucial to operations since they controlled the machinery. Both groups were the best paid workers and enjoyed permanent employment. When canneries were closed, they received employment elsewhere in the companies' operations. Many alternated shore work with fishing. Unlike Chinese and native workers, they shared many of the same ideological perspectives as did the militant union leaders. Thus, while certification efforts began in 1941, it was not until 1947 that the entire labour force was covered by collective agreements.

Although the general objective was to unionize all workers, the strategy of concentrating on plants rather than workers was reinforced when the canners, in 1942, refused to negotiate for all categories of cannery labour. It was at that point that Local 89 directed its efforts to organizing the skilled categories. The last group to be covered by a supplement was the general labour group, largely women and Chinese. While a master agreement covered general working conditions, each group was covered by a specific agreement outlining its job classification and wages. The first agreements listed separate classifications for Chinese men. However, as collective bargaining replaced the Chinese contract system as a mode of payment, the Chinese dwindled as a proportion of the total labour force; a factor of both the decreased importance of the Chinese contract system, and immigration laws which had virtually closed the doors to Chinese immigrants since 1923. (In the late 1940's, the Chinese cannery workers were generally advanced in age.)

The war period was conducive to union organization. Great Britain secured the canned salmon and herring packs, as well as the products of the reduction industry, to feed its armies and population. Fish runs in these years were exceptional and profits soared. Because of its status as a designated war industry, the federal government intervened to prevent strikes and lockouts. The creation of the Regional War Labour Relations Board as a third party in labour negotiations was crucial in suc-
cessful negotiations between the UFAWU and the companies. Each round of collective bargaining ended in stalemate, at which point government intervention was required. As noted, the first task in the fish plants was to extend certification to include seasonal female and Chinese labourers in addition to the handful of permanent craft workers. Again, government intervention was crucial. Because of the war industries, the labour movement began to be successful in its insistence on fair labour laws. The canners realized they could no longer operate under the Chinese contract system, and were forced to include all employees on payroll sheets and pay them on an individual basis. Minimum wage laws were also introduced and this was crucial in the employment of women. Minimum age laws reduced the employment of children in canneries.

The most militant women tended to come from the fresh fish and cold storage sector. It was here that the UFAWU recruited the first female groups of workers. The numbers employed were small in comparison to the canneries, and jobs were year round. In addition, men and women often performed exactly the same work, unlike canneries where job categories were structured by gender. Thus, when the Director of Selective Services announced a government policy of equal pay for equal work for “Canada’s growing army of women”, it was easy to point to specific areas in these plants where women were doing the same work as men for lower pay. In 1942, the employees of the Edmunds and Walker firm in New Westminster unanimously decided to include women in their agreements. There were twenty-five employees in total, and most were permanently employed. Many of the women were filleters, one of the most highly skilled groups in the industry.

In 1944, the cannery men elected Alex Gordon as their new organizer. The resolutions at the annual union convention that year included “a single master agreement covering all branches of the industry within the Union’s jurisdiction, instead of separate agreements for each section,” signalling the union’s adoption of the goal of establishing a single industrial union for the entire fishing industry. In 1945, Gordon was elected Business Agent for the UFAWU, a position to which he was re-elected throughout the period under review. Responsible for organizing the shore sector, he was committed to extending the benefits of industrial unionism to all workers. The task facing
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Gordon can be illustrated by looking briefly at the situation of tendermen.

Tendermen were the first group of shore workers to request (in 1940) union organization. Hired by the companies to work on their fish packers, they formed an intermediate grouping between fishers and plant workers. Some fishers also alternated employment between fishing and working on packers. They traveled to key spots on the grounds, and to the various camps, and collected the fish from the boats.

All of the major strikes in the industry had been waged by fishers, and shoreworkers were asked time and again to support them. Not until 1954, did the reverse situation occur when tendermen went out on strike. “Tendermen and shoreworkers have proven their spirit of unity and brotherhood in past strikes through their solid support of the fishermen. This is the first time, however, that the fishermen have been called on to give up fishing time in order that a group of their fellow workers might win a square deal from the operators.” The strike was short-lived, lasting eight and a half days (August 6-15). The feeling was expressed that the tendermen had settled due to pressure put on them by the fishers to end the strike.

Here was the basic organizational work facing union organizers. First, the needs and demands of shoreworkers had to be formulated and expressed. Once expressed, the members had to be prepared to fight for their demands. Fishers had a long and active history of such organized struggle. Shoreworkers didn’t. At most, they had walked out briefly in demand for higher wages and better conditions. However, shoreworkers held a number of advantages. First, in an era of anti-combines legislation and anti-communist agitation, fishers as a group could be made extremely vulnerable because they negotiated on an independent basis over fish prices and, as such, were not wage workers. However, if they were allied in a union with industrial wage workers, and if they could press their demands on the basis of the industry in which they laboured side by side with these workers, their presentation of themselves as wage labourers could be substantiated. Second, the position of shoreworkers was clearly substandard in comparison to most other provincial industries and to neighboring American fish plants. Some of the latter were owned by the same companies,
paying higher wages to the better organized American workers. Especially in the fight for benefits (such as unemployment insurance, workers’ compensation, pension and welfare plans), for which a clear case could be made for plant workers, fishers could press their demands at the same time, placing them in a stronger bargaining position.

As mentioned, the war years were conducive to union organization, and the UFAWU established certification and negotiated higher wages and better hours. However, when the war ended, markets again became problematic. In 1948, herring canning, which had provided a prolonged period of employment for seasonal workers since it preceded salmon canning, was ended. During the 1930s, companies had begun to close outlying plants. This trend was halted during wartime prosperity, but resumed in the 1950s. Whereas in 1944, 6,150 shoreworkers were employed, the number fell to 3,947 by 1952; and the decline continued in the following years. In 1944, there were 31 canneries with 100 canning lines; in 1957, there were 17 with 58 lines. Plants were consolidated and centralized near urban centers. Native villages had adopted northern canneries into their cyclical migratory pattern, and both men and women were dependent on the cash income generated from fishing, net mending, and cannery work. Many of these canneries were now closed, and workers had to either migrate to the northern cities of Port Edward and Prince Rupert, or face welfare relief in their winter villages. This was an issue the UFAWU undertook, mobilizing native women. Because native women were proletarianized more radically than native fishermen, class consciousness created cleavages within many native households. Generally, native women have been stauncher UFAWU supporters than many of their male kin, who have espoused the causes of native organizations like the Native Brotherhood. The UFAWU and Native Brotherhood negotiate jointly for collective agreements; but, while the union has focused on the interests of shoreworkers and fishers as proletarians, the Native Brotherhood has had a wider mandate. Native fishers have interests tied to their aboriginal claims and status. In addition, large boat owners who hire wage labourers are included in the Native Brotherhood while excluded from UFAWU membership. This has led to severe disagreements between the two organizations. For example, the
1952 salmon strike ended, after four days, to prevent growing disunity and division among fishers. The Native Brotherhood was opposed to strike action and indicated it would sign agreements with the companies for its members.

The Native Brotherhood was founded in 1930, and was the first organization to sign an agreement (in 1943) between native cannery workers and the canners. Later agreements signed by both groups were similar. However, jurisdictional friction developed over plants employing both native and non-native workers. Religious differences had some impact. Missionaries from the various Christian denominations had been active from the time the Spanish landed on Vancouver Island at the end of the eighteenth century. Workers who were devout Christians found it difficult to join a union whose leadership belonged to the Communist Party. These differences were brought into the open when two union executives were barred from the Victoria Trades and Labour Congress conference in November 1950, because of their political affiliation. This issue was a contentious one at shoreworkers' Local meetings. Because native fishers and shoreworkers formed a significant proportion of the industry, such splits threatened to tear the union apart. Union organizers dealt with such differences by focusing on common problems. Beginning in 1950, the UFAWU launched a major campaign to end racial discrimination. "We wish to point out ... that discrimination on the basis of racial background is a common method used to divide workers." 49 "We must not forget the lessons of the past when the fishermen and allied workers were divided along racial, gear and craft lines and the operators were thus able to play one group against the other to the detriment of all." 49

The consolidation and concentration occurring in the 1950s affected native women with particular severity. On the Skeena River — the second major canning center next to the Fraser at the turn of the century — there was talk of establishing one cannery to process all fish on a pool basis. In the same year, 1949, west coast canning operations were almost nil. 50 This had been another large employment center for native shoreworkers. In fact, it was here that native women had been most supportive of union organization and the first Native Brotherhood agreement signed. The introduction of refrigerated packers and refrigeration systems on fish boats meant that fish
could be carried longer distances. Gone were the days when canneries dotted major salmon-producing streams. As northern canneries closed, whole villages of native people were thrown out of work. In the nineteenth century, the canners had transformed the inhabitants of these villages into a proletarianized labour force. Now they were no longer needed, and there was little alternative employment available; especially for the women, who were forced into urban areas, seeking employment in the fish plants at Port Edward and Prince Rupert, or forced to apply for welfare assistance, becoming permanent wards of the state.

At most plants, accommodation facilities for native people reflected the racial discrimination upon which the industry was built. Native women were active in attempting to rectify the situation. At Namu shore meetings, for example, most of the “beefs” were raised by the native women. “The matter of two Native women who came to the plant early and were placed in the regular bunkhouse and were then compelled to move into the separate bunkhouse for Native women later on was raised as an instance of what we consider to be discrimination.”51 A symbolic act took place in 1954, when a meeting of 154 Native Brotherhood and UFAWU cannery workers at Namu voted unanimously to remove signs on two adjoining women’s rest rooms, one reading “Natives” only and the other, “Whites” only.52

The increasing militancy of native women was reflected when they changed their status within the Native Brotherhood from a Women’s Auxiliary to the Native Sisterhood. “We hope and trust that the time is not too far distant when every sister will have an equal voice with every brother.”53 In the fishing industry, native women have a history of supporting the UFAWU far more staunchly than most of the native fishers, an example of working-class experience cutting across family and cultural ties.

While Native women were especially affected by plant closures, women workers in general also felt the impact. High-speed machines were adopted, existing machinery was speeded up, and new machines were introduced, cutting down on the total number of workers needed, especially in the warehouses, can lofts, and on the filling lines. In the period 1944-1953, there was an estimated fifty percent reduction in the number of women employed.54
It was not only the work of women on the cannery assembly lines that was affected by speed-ups. In 1953, Prince Rupert filleters were told they must meet production standards and offered a six cent per hour bonus if they could surpass the standard required of an experienced fillet (45 pounds of sole, skinned both sides, per hour). In addition, this particular company was contemplating introducing piece work, on an incentive bonus plan, for picking shrimp or crab where such operations became sizable. Women had to work more intensively in those areas where their work paced them to the speed of a machine — as well as in those jobs which remained manual operations. Gordon used this to fight for better wages. "Any comment with respect to the type of work done and general conditions under which the women work is unnecessary for anyone familiar with the industry. Certainly, the work is more difficult, wet, and dirty, and with just as much skill required, as work done in the sugar refineries, paper box and bag factories, and meat packing plants . . . [In] what other industry are women required to display the same skill and strength for the kind of wages paid to experienced filleters and for the type of sporadic employment offered?" However, women plant workers in the 1950s did not fare well in terms of wage increases, compared to other classifications and to fishers. The canners were opposed to recognizing their right to a decent wage. Given their history of employment on the basis of cheap wages, they found it difficult to press their demands.

When UFAWU contracts were introduced in canneries, beginning in 1945, negotiations for the skilled sector differed from the rest. For example, most men were guaranteed monthly wages. Negotiations for them involved shortening the hours constituting a working month and increasing wages. Women and casual male labourers were paid by the hour, with no overtime pay or guarantee of hours worked. Women filling cans (in the north, predominantly native women) received piece rates. Gordon attempted, with little success, to abolish these altogether. In 1952, for example, native women were required to fill 346 cans per hour to achieve the minimum wage of 98 cents per hour. The union was able to institute beginners' rates for this group. The major goal for hourly-paid employees was the institution of first, the 44 hour and subsequently, the 40 hour week with overtime pay for all hours.
worked in excess of eight hours per day, five days a week. This right was finally won in 1955. "To our knowledge, no other definitely seasonal groups either in Canada or the U.S. have established the condition." It was especially important in a seasonal industry such as fish canning, because it enabled workers to earn overtime pay, thus supplementing in a minor way for the short season.

Seniority rights were one of the most significant gains. They guaranteed workers employment for the duration of the season and the right to be re-called the following year to their old position and salary level. A benefit of special importance for native women was won in 1949, when women sent to northern plants were given a monthly guarantee, "with this amount to be payable to all women cannery workers at such plants regardless of the place of hiring." This was the first of a series of struggles to have women treated independently of their male relatives. For example, canners assumed women travelled with their male kin, and did not provide transportation costs as they did to male workers.

Despite these gains, shoreworkers were slow in becoming more militant. While fishermen went out on strike year after year, shoreworkers adopted a conciliatory stance. The AFAWU required a two-thirds majority in a strike vote. For example, in 1952, fishermen went out four times, resulting in the complete loss of the herring season. The most militant workers were the ones to realize gains. Thus, although Gordon pressed for a 10 cent per hour increase in 1953, in the final agreements women received no increases at all; while the skilled cannerymen, netmen and refrigeration men and refrigeration engineers did. Even these were regarded jealously by fishers. "Several fishermen have asked what the proposed increases so far granted to shoreworkers will mean in increased costs to the fishing companies." In a tightened economic climate, each group sought to protect its own interests. Women did not press their demands; and, as a result, while plans to improve their wages and conditions were formulated, they were often the first to be dropped at the bargaining table. Consequently, from 1951 to 1954, women and inexperienced and semi-qualified men received no wage increases.

In 1952, Gordon began to hold annual wage conferences at the beginning of the year. Male and female cannery workers,
networkers, fresh fish and cold storage workers, those in the reduction plants, steam and refrigeration engineers, watchmen and saltery workers attended, on a representational basis. At the first of these conferences, some groups expressed more dissatisfaction than others with existing conditions. The most vocal were the craftsmen. Gordon noted that women needed wage increases because living costs had gone up, and speed up had occurred in the industry. "Among this group, however, it was recognized by the wage conference that dissatisfaction with the rate during the 1951 season was not strongly expressed."52

Women first began to make themselves heard at meetings of their Locals, and as elected shop stewards and representatives on negotiating committees. It was here that they first learned to confront company representatives over local "beefs" and issues pertinent to their particular plants and jobs. The Minutes of these meetings testify to this learning process; one which involved articulating their needs and learning how to fight collectively for their rights. Results began to appear in the latter part of the decade. Mickey Beagle was the first woman to be elected an officer of the UFAWU when, in 1954, she was elected second Vice-President by acclamation.63 She was named a general organizer in 1959, a full-time union position. In 1956, Verna Parkins was elected President of the Prince Rupert Shoreworkers. This was believed to be the first time a woman had held this post in any shoreworker local.64 Both women had been active for many years prior to their elections, as union members and as shoreworkers.

Two sets of arguments were used in negotiations with the canners. Comparisons were made between craft workers in the fishing industry and those in other basic industries in British Columbia, such as sawmills, logging camps, smelters, pulp and sulfite plants, shipyards and the building trades. Canners were willing to negotiate percentage increases, with the highest assigned to the trade classifications. Beginning in 1951, however, the union began to insist on equal increases for all classifications.65 Company representatives fought against this move, arguing it was not a logical one, and that the union should request graduated increases with the highest rates receiving the best increases.66 This was one way in which the union attempted to narrow the large gap between monthly-paid craftsmen and seasonally employed, hourly-paid workers. Alex
Gordon advanced a second set of arguments in negotiating for these classifications. He insisted that the wages paid to women be on a par with other organized industries like bakeries, pulp sulfite plants, BC Sugar, American Can Company, distilleries, plywood plants and supermarkets. In 1958, women’s wages lagged far behind those received in these industries. They also lagged behind wages received in the much older unionized plants in Alaska and Washington. The companies insisted on making comparisons with fruit and vegetable cannery workers in the Vancouver area and in the Okanagan, to certain food packaging concerns, laundries, certain selected classifications in the meat packaging plants, certain gold mines, fishworkers rates in Nova Scotia, and rates paid to fish workers in Japan and other fish-producing countries. Although wage discrepancies existed on the basis of craft skill, the comparisons pushed by the canners were those with unorganized industries.

In 1954, the union finally won equal increases across the board for all shoreworkers in a two-year agreement. This was also the year in which the 40-hour week was won, effective the following year. In 1956, equal conditions for all racial groups and equality between male and female workers were cited as key objectives at the initial negotiating meeting for cannery, net and reduction plant workers. These included improved accommodation for natives and the need for nursery and playground facilities for children. The three groups decided to settle their agreements together that year, and a strike was narrowly averted. “And just as shoreworkers have backed fishermen to the limit in their many struggles against the operators, so will the fishing fleet stand solidly with their fellow members of the Union in the shore section of the industry.” This resulted in another across-the-board increase for all shoreworkers in a two-year agreement; a welfare plan to be instituted in 1957; and equal treatment of native workers (a clause built into the collective agreement). In 1957, in a year when shoreworkers were not negotiating for a new agreement, fishers and tendermen were involved in five strikes. Three of these were to prevent cuts in prices.

The union, as noted, insisted on across the board increases. Disparities between male craft workers and seasonal workers (most of them women) were already great, and percentage increases only served to widen the gap. However, in 1958, the
union was forced to settle on this basis by the companies, although it insisted on a one-year contract. As the union membership became increasingly militant, especially following a decade with little or no increase in wages, the employers sought to reinforce old divisions. They were willing to improve the conditions of their small nucleus of male craft workers, but not those of their large seasonal labour force. They tried to play one group against another, a tactic used throughout the century. In 1959, the union policy was not to sign any agreement unless all agreements covering fishers, tendermen, and shoreworkers were signed at the same time, which led to the first industry-wide strike in which all groups participated. It ended when certain groups began to show signs of weakening. Chief among these was the shore section.

However, the strike experience left its mark. For the first time, workers joined together to process their own catches and to sell the product to support the strikers. This was made possible when the Tulloch-Western cannery allowed strikers to use its facilities. Most canners negotiated through the Fisheries Association (the old Salmon Canners' Operating Committee had changed its name to reflect the fact that salmon canners were branching into other fisheries). However, a few, like Tulloch-Western, negotiated separately with the UFAWU; although, generally, independents adopted the same collective agreements. Fish caught during the strike were processed by some of the Tulloch-Western shoreworkers. The cans bore the union label and were sold, with the proceeds going into the strike fund. For the first time, shoreworkers controlled their own labour process.

At the end of the decade, shoreworkers emerged in a much stronger position than they had entered it. Their ranks were decimated through plant closures, consolidation and centralization, mechanization and speed-ups. However, the remaining labour force was much more cohesive. The enforcement of seniority resulted in relatively low labour turnover. Various benefits had been won. Racial discrimination was brought into the open and fought. In the decades that followed, demands continued to center around equality in wages for men and women. In the 1980s, BC shoreworkers are said to be the most highly paid fish workers in the world. Continuing mechanization and plant closures have further reduced their numbers.
addition, companies have moved their operations to other countries where they can recruit cheaper labour. The workers that do remain consist of the same groups hired in the formative years. At least half of the labour force is female, and the great majority of workers are of non-European origin. The significant difference is in their wages and working conditions. These groups were originally recruited because they could be defined as cheap labour on the basis of existing racial and gender prejudices. This definition changed due to the organizational efforts of the UFAWU and the Native Brotherhood, combined with the active support given them by their membership. Inequalities continue, but, compared to other unorganized workforces in British Columbia and elsewhere, significant advances have been made.

**Conclusion** Marx predicted that the capitalist mode of production would radically transform the means of production, creating a class of proletarianized labour with nothing but its labour power offered for sale to capitalists. In the case of the BC fishing industry, the requirements of a seasonal labour force made it advantageous for capitalists to only partially proletarianize labour. This was done in two ways. Contractors' services were enlisted to engage Chinese men. The relationship here between contractor and labourer was not part of the capitalist mode of production. Pre-capitalist relations, originating in China, were used so that canners did not create a wage labour force totally dependent on incomes from the fishing industry. Similarly, canners encouraged native villages to relocate at remote cannery sites for the summer; and, used the labour of women, children and the elderly for inside work, paced according to salmon runs. Native workers returned to their villages after the canning season ended, when their labour was no longer required. If canners had totally proletarianized the native economy, native people might have become more militant in pressing for decent wages. Because their original economy survived, cash income remained a supplement, and canners could pay extremely cheap wages.

Capitalism is an extremely flexible system precisely because it incorporates non-capitalist relations of production, transforming them partially to suit the needs of specific industries. The Third World is currently undergoing such partial trans-
formation as capitalists seek new sources of cheap labour. Within Canada, new immigrants, especially women, continue to be drawn in as outlined above, and provincial fishing companies continue to hire from these groups. However, there has been one important historical development. Unionization was introduced by fishers eager to promote their own interests. However, these hinged on the unionization of shorworkers. A Communist Party leadership then actively worked to raise class consciousness among these workers. While Chinese men were almost totally displaced, native and other women became active within the union. They started at the local level, pressing for small gains. Once these were realized, however, they moved on to larger issues — and a group of workers considered by both employers and trade unionists as on the outskirts of the working class developed a proletarian consciousness. To be sure, not all UFAWU shorworkers consider themselves to be proletarians involved in a wider struggle. However, that even a proportion — including a significant contingent of women — has developed such a consciousness testifies to the possibilities of mobilizing what is generally considered "cheap labour" or a reserve army of labour on the margins of the working class.

Notes

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Most of the research for this paper centered around documentary evidence. Although archival sources contain much information, it is very difficult to gain a sense of the ongoing struggle and the spirit of the process being researched. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Alex and Margaret Gordon. They have freely given me their time, trying to educate me in this regard. They verified facts and events, but, above all, they have given me a glimpse of what it was like to be a union organizer in the days when plants were flung over wide distances in remotely accessible areas, and when most of the energy of the canners was spent trying to prevent any type of organization. It is very difficult to capture that spirit in a scholarly endeavour and I apologize to Alex and Margaret for not being able to duplicate it. They do not necessarily agree with all of the interpretations offered here, but I thank them for their time, and above all for their encouragement. I also wish to thank Pat Marchak, Keith Ralston, and all the members of the Fish and Ships Research Project for their help. In an effort to use non-sexist language, the word "fisher" has been used in place of the more common "fisherman". Although most fishers are men, women have always fished, although they have often not been officially recognized as fishers.

Studies in Political Economy


3. "From earliest times to the Industrial Revolution the craft or skilled trade was the basic unit, the elementary cell of the labor process." Braverman, Monopoly Capital, 109. (See n. 1 above.) My fundamental disagreement with Braverman rests on the way in which "craft" or "skilled labor" is defined. If he means craftsmen organized in guilds, then he has omitted from his analysis the majority of workers.

4. Ivan Illich uses the analogy of an iceberg. He labels the tip the visible economy, and the mass the hidden economy. See Ivan Illich, Gender (New York, 1982) p. 45, note 30: "Shadow Work".


8. F.W. Woolworth, 1892; quoted in Ibid., 371.

9. Ibid., 262.


12. A number of recent studies have explored this point. The argument is made that the era of the fur trade was one to which native people could adapt and from which they could profit. It did not disrupt the economy upon which their culture was based, in marked contrast to the way in which capitalism has been introduced in sparsely populated areas where the native economy has remained relatively intact. See J.D. House, "Coastal Labrador: Incorporation, Exploitation and Underdevelopment," Journal of Canadian Studies, 15:2 (Summer 1980), 98-113; and John Loxley, "The 'Great Northern' Plan," Studies in Political Economy, no. 46 (Autumn 1981), 151-82. The opposite position is taken by Eleanor Leacock in her work on the Montagnais-Naskapi in Labrador, and by Ron Bourgeault in his work on the creation of the Metis on the Canadian prairies during the period of the fur trade. See Ron Bourgeault, "The Indians, the Metis and the Fur Trade: Class, Sexism and Racism in the Transition from Communism to Capitalism," Studies in Political Economy, no. 12 (Fall 1983), 45-80.


16. SP, Vol. IV, No. 4, No. 18 (1871) p. 4.

17. SP, Vol. XVI, Part 12, No. 93 (1883) p. 11.

18. SP, Vol. XVIII, Part 12, No. 54a (1885) p. xxii, xxix and xxx.

19. Ibid., pp. xvi and xviii.


21. SP, Vol. XVIII, Part 12, No. 54a (1885) p. xi.
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22. Ibid., p. ixix.
23. Ibid.
24. There is evidence that Chinese employees attempted to organize. In response to the contractors establishing a Chinese Contractors Union, in 1904 Chinese workers formed the Chinese Cannery Employees Union, largely in an effort to deal with contractors who, after payment by the canners, absconded to China without paying their crews. See Percy Henry Gladstone, "Industrial Disputes in the Commercial Fisheries of British Columbia," (MA thesis, UBC, 1959), pp. 296-97. Since each cannery contracted individually, considerable variation existed. The general practice is described here.


30. Alexander Ewen, pioneer canner, ibid., 139.
31. Ibid., 135 and 141.
33. SP, Vol. XL, No. 10, No. 22, Appendix 10 (1906) p. 210. "The Indians do not only catch and cure salmon for their own use, but herd it up every year for sale and barter, it is a sort of legal tender amongst them, ten salmon for a dollar and so many for a blanket..."
34. SP, Vol. XXVI, Part 7, No. 10c (1893) p. 117.
37. For the impact of the butchering machines in transforming the canning lines, see Duncan A. Stacey, Sockeye and Tinplace: Technological Change in the Fraser River Canning Industry 1871-1912, (British Columbia Provincial Museum, Heritage Record No. 15, 1982).
38. The Fisherman, VIII:8 (March 8, 1946), 8. This argument was used by BC Packers' company representatives when they refused to negotiate minimum wages for female employees at the Ogden Point plant in Victoria. The company insisted women did not need to be paid on the same basis as men since their husbands were supporting them. A number of studies have explored this issue in the last few years. See Pat and Hugh Armstrong, The Double Ghetto (Toronto, 1978), and A Working Majority (Ottawa, 1983). For a Marxist development of the arguments used to assign lower wages to women on the basis of gender, see Patricia Connelly, Last Hired, First Fired, (Toronto, 1978).
39. The Fisherman, 1:12 (July 31, 1937), 1. In comparison the wages of Chinese men in 1897 were estimated to be 14.8 cents per hour ($1.48 for a ten-hour day). SP, Vol. XXXVI, No. 13, No. 54 (1902) p. 164.
41. For more details on the pattern of UFAWU organization in its formative years, see Muszynski, "The Organization of Women and Ethnic Minorities". (See n. 25 above)
42. *The Fisherman*, IV:45 (October 27, 1942), 4; and no. 16 (March 24, 1942), 4.
43. *The Fisherman*, VI:7 (Feb. 22, 1944), 1; and no. 9 (March 14, 1944), 1.
51. UFAWU, Vol. 52, (Transferred from Book 3 — Vancouver, Steveston, Victoria, Sooke, and Namu Shoreworkers Minutes; minutes of meeting with management at Namu, August 28, 1956).
54. For example, the installation of high-speed machines in one cannery resulted in the cutting of the crew from 60 to 48 workers, while the same volume of fish was processed in less time. *The Fisherman*, XVI:13 (April 20, 1954), 1; and no. 22 (July 13, 1954), 6.
55. *The Fisherman*, XV:16 (May 19, 1953), 1.
58. Piece rates were abolished in the early 1960s, when the introduction of ½ lb. filling machines rendered hand filling of cans obsolete.
69. *The Fisherman*, XVIII:6 (Feb. 14, 1956), 1,6; no. 24 (July 10, 1956), 1,6; and no. 25 (July 17, 1956), 1.
72. *The Fisherman*, XXI:29, (August 21, 1959), 1. It was common for fishers to go out during a strike and sell their catches directly to the public, with proceeds going into the strike fund. In this case, the government prevented fishers from selling fish from government docks. The fish was placed in cold storage and, since Tullock-Western had signed an agreement, company officials allowed shoreworkers to process this fish for the union.
73. In the 1950s, fish workers in American canneries located in Washington and Alaska were much more highly paid than those in British Columbia. However, American unions have not been as successful as the UFAWU in fighting anti-combines legislation. Their organizations have been severely weakened as a consequence. This is reflected in wage rates. For example, in 1983, women classified as “Egg Pullers, Packers, Sorters, and Slimers” received $6.46 per hour in plants located in Bellingham and Puget Sound, Washington (ILWU). The lowest rate, apart from probationary employees, received by UFAWU members in 1982 was $11.18 per hour, almost double the rates received across the border.