

**A MAN OF OUR TIMES**

**The life-history of a Japanese-Canadian  
fisherman**

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'In fishing the timing is the most important. Good weather brings better fishing; sunny days are usually better fishing than when there is wind and rain. But most depends on the time and tide. We try to catch the low tide and the high tide. It doesn't matter whether it is morning or evening, night or day. It all depends on tide-time. It changes. So we work together with the tide and there is no night and day. Night doesn't make any difference. I can tell the time and I can tell direction at sea. You learn, it becomes like instinct. Wind, stars, mountains. A fisherman can tell where he is at night. I never make mistakes in directions. Fishermen don't make such mistakes.'

Ryuichi Yoshida. *Fishing the Skeena*, 1911.

## Introduction

This is not a tale of some mythical bygone era when people were simpler and conditions happier. Nor is it a personal version of an exotic ethnic history. Ruichi Yoshida's story bears the impress of real life, with its complex hopes, struggles, defeats, insights and tenacity. It is remarkably free of the nostalgia or bitterness which sometimes colours such accounts. It entails a fidelity to the experiences and views developed during a long life of work and social commitment. The triumph involved relates to the maintenance of that fidelity and to the ability to wrest some joy and many decent social relations from very difficult situations.

Neither Yoshida's account nor the appended historical background are moulded in the pattern of standard ethnic histories. So many of these are baudlerized tales which while seeming to promote an appreciation for cultural diversity mainly tend to denigrate the real vitality and history of the people involved. The recipe for many such tales involves a mention of first settlers (usually pictured as awe-struck peasants), an account of initial hardships overcome by hard work and frugality, an invariable commitment to political quiescence and conservatism, and an ultimate payoff of modest financial security and of increasing numbers of the second generation entering the middle class. Further obligatory ingredients include allusion to unique cultural values and ethos (never fully understandable to outsiders) and descriptions of wonderfully warm and strong family times, of traditional ceremonials and of colourful song and dance routines. Top off with the mention of a few Horatio Alger notables and a reduced list of 'contributions to Canadian culture' and we have the outline of most standard ethnic histories.

They are pleasant tales; apparently the way many Canadians like their history - a place for everyone and everyone in their place. No systematic exploitation or injustice, no lifetimes of hard work and frugality leading to poverty, no real sweat and struggle, no labour or political militancy. Sometimes the tales are written by those intent on

refurbishing the view that North America is the locus of all significant material, intellectual and spiritual freedom and progress. Often, ethnic histories are primarily reflective of the views and interests of political brokers or of certain elements within the ethnic bourgeoisie. In such histories class differences and struggles *within* the immigrant community are particularly excluded. The only topic more taboo than internal class division are accounts of ideological and organizational link-up between elements of the ethnic community and other sectors of the Canadian working class. This is not to suggest that there are no valuable and authentic ethnic histories - there clearly are. But they are relatively few and often the best are untranslated. Often they are unknown even to the sons and daughters or grandchildren of those involved.

Ryuichi Yoshida's story is first and foremost a life history, that of a limited number of individuals. However it is more reflective of a 'people's history' than of a purely ethnic history. This flows from Yoshida's account itself and is not due to any extraneous editing. Most ethnic histories, whatever else their character and authenticity, tend to emphasize that which separates and divides members of one group from others. A people's history (for want of a better term), while recognizing cultural differences as important, attempts to restore a recognition of the commonalties of interest and experience which exist among and which can unite working people.

In view of the above, considering Ryuichi Yoshida's life history in isolation may create a certain distortion. Much of what he recounts may be mistakenly taken as a purely Japanese-Canadian experience. In fact, Yoshida's life had much in common with those of others, regardless of national origin, who worked in the primary resource industries of Western Canada during the period discussed. It is not here possible to detail those commonalties but suffice it to say that they were many and central. The Historical Background provides some mention of life and conditions in the primary resource industries and a brief account of the role of Japanese-Canadians in working class movements.

As to the collection and editing of this life history: Koizumi and Knight outlined the focus of the interviews. Mr.

Yoshida, while once moderately fluent in English, then relied upon Japanese for any but the most cursory comments. Koizumi carried out the interviews with Yoshida (in conjunction with Knight) and did the oral translation. Knight is responsible for the transcription and editing and saw the manuscript into print. Editing was done primarily to create chronological and thematic continuity of the material. It is our belief that the present version remains faithful to the style, specifics and the main thrust of the original. Moreover, Ryuichi Yoshida himself read, corrected and provided some editorial modifications for the present text. This account is separate and distinct from any other and was not funded or sponsored by any group or agency. It has Mr Yoshida's approval and his written permission for publication.

The historical background and footnotes were researched and written by Knight. Their aim is to add to a fuller understanding of Yoshida's story. It should be noted that this life history could not have been gathered by just any Japanese-speaking interviewer. A crucial element in eliciting the account as it stands was the spontaneous and mutual appreciation of Koizumi and Yoshida.

Listening to Mr. Yoshida reminds me of many others, from a variety of national backgrounds, who during the same period had worked in the resource industries of B.C. Like Yoshida, the lives of many were moulded not only by the day to day realities which faced them but also by a vision of a different and better world that could be. Let Maya Koizumi introduce Ryuichi Yoshida.

'Mr. Yoshida use to be twice as big when he was young,' says Mrs. Yoshida. Even though he bends a little now, it is not hard to believe Mrs Yoshida's recollection. Today he is still a tall, large man, with wide shoulders and a face set in a frame of bone. He talks in a strong, clear voice - symbolizing, to me, his life and mind for the past 89 years.'

' In some ways Mr. Yoshida is a man of Meiji Japan, particularly in his views of man/woman relations. But in other ways he is very different from many Japanese people of that time and today. He does not make a big thing of family ties; he is not eager for respectability or wealth, he is not silenced by community social pressures. When I talk to him I have no feeling of a generation gap.'

'Mr. Yoshida worked with his body all his life. All his life he hardly owned anything. Much of his life was devoted to the Labour Union rather than to his own personal gain. During the internment he was not as much affected as some other people because he had few possessions to lose - his life was always hard. But difficulties in his private life did not stop him from doing what he thought he should do, both in the Japanese Community and outside it.'

'Social pressure against those criticizing or opposing the established leadership of the Japanese community was traditionally very strong. Perhaps for this reason the importance of the Labour Union and the lives of its supporters have been disregarded in the histories of the Japanese in Canada. For that reason, Mr. Yoshida's story remains unique.'

'At the end of the story Mr. Yoshida says that he does not think that his life was particularly unusual. He lived and worked like many others and, like them, remained poor. However, the activities of Mr. Yoshida, especially in the founding of the Labour Union, certainly required a determination and idealism that were unusual in these circumstances. I think that his last statement about his own life should perhaps be stood as a touch of understatement.'

'What impressed me most was Mr. Yoshida's calm and his detached wry humor. Even when he talks about the hardship or the various oppressions they faced or the way the supporters of the Labour Union were blacklisted in the Japanese community, he can laugh. He is also very frank and open in saying what he believes. He is not bitter about his own life and this, to me, says that his spirit has never yielded, that he has never been broken by the many difficulties what faced him. He does not regret the way he lived. He lived according to his own conscience and decisions. To my eyes he lived his life fully.'

## **Ruichi Yoshida's Story**

## Early Years

I was born in 1887, in a village of old Boshu, now Chiba Prefecture. My family owned about 100 acres of land, they were old landowners. My grandfather used to own the land and farmers gave him so much of the crop each year. We lived in a big, very old, house and my father didn't work or do anything in particular. My grandfather died at the age of ninety; he and my grandmother lived in a retirement house by then and the blacksmith's daughter came and looked after them. He was a good grandfather and used to tell me all sorts of stories from Tokugawa days when I was small. I used to walk on his back as a boy to give massage, and he used to give me presents. He was very big, tall and fat. I don't know what the world thought about him but to me he was a very gentle, kind grandfather. 1

My father wasn't a very good father. He had a bad drinking habit. Once he was drunk he became very difficult, nobody could stand him. When he was drinking my mother hid herself somewhere and I used to bring him his food and bottles. I was not afraid of him. My grandfather always told me that I shouldn't become like my father when I grew up.

My mother? Well, she was a woman, she was very kind. She was my father's second wife. Both my mother and father had married before but had been widowed. I had two step-sisters by my mother's first marriage who lived in another village. I also had one older brother who died when I was quite young. I was born when my mother was already forty. I was the only child of that marriage who survived.

When I came to Canada my mother was still alive; she lived to be eighty-six. She was against me coming over to America. I told her that I would come back soon and she accepted that. I first thought that I would return to Japan after some years. But once I came to Canada it was the end. All my family in Japan, all the people from my youth are dead now. There is only the daughter of one step-sister still alive and she is a very old woman now.

I came to America when I was twenty-three years old. I had studied law at Hosei University and I thought I would become either a lawyer or a civil servant. I took the exam as a lawyer but failed. So I decided to go to America. I did not have any definite purpose in mind, like earning a lot of money. I generally felt that I would be alright whatever happened. After settling in Canada I gradually felt that I would be far behind everybody I knew if I went back to Japan. It would be too much trouble to re-study law and start again. So I gradually gave up the idea of returning and ended up living in Canada for almost sixty-five years now.

I arrived in Vancouver in May, 1910 and left for the United States the same day. I went to Seattle where I lived in a Japanese inn and tried to find a job. But I couldn't find any kind of work in Seattle, no work at all. I had become friends with a man called Ikuyama on the boat coming to Canada. His brother had a farm he leased in Coquitlam. I was in Seattle two months and exchanged letters with my friend Ikuyama. I said that I couldn't get a job and the money I brought with me was going very fast. Ikuyama advised me to come to Canada and offered me a job on his brothers farm. So that is how I came to Canada.

I went to Coquitlam and worked on that farm but I didn't like it. I don't like farming, it is boring. They grew potatoes and vegetables for sale. They had two horses for work, a cow for milk and some pigs to feed the left over vegetables to. My work was mostly weeding and making hills for potatoes or digging up carrots. That is not the kind of job for me. They could pay almost no wages because they hardly made a profit on that farm. They gave up and went back to Japan some years later.

After two weeks or so on that farm I quit and went to Vancouver to look for a job. I went to the Yotatsu Gaisha, a Japanese labour contractor company. They sent me up to work on the C.P.R. railway, to a camp near Golden. Our work was to change the old rails and put down new ones. It was all done by hand. Where the roadway was rough we took up soil and rock from one spot and filled in low parts elsewhere. With picks and shovels and wheelbarrows, making a flat bed for the rails. There were

about sixty Japanese workers in our camp and one white foreman. The wage was about twenty cents an hour I think. But food was very cheap so we could get by. Ten hours a day, six days a week. Only Sunday was a rest day. 2.

I had a strong body then so the work was not hard for me. I don't remember that my work was so particularly hard. The main trouble was the bedbugs in the C.P.R. bunkhouse. I was very much bothered by them. Bedbugs must like me because other people weren't so much bothered by them. I didn't stay long, only about a week. That was my first real job in Canada.

The Yotatsu Gaisha company had an office in Revelstoke. They provided the C.P.R. with Japanese workers in many parts of B.C. I went to their office and asked for a pass to go back to Vancouver. Since I had worked only a week they wouldn't give me a pass. I did not get any wages either because that was charged against my fare to the camp. By that time I had no money at all. So I went to a Chinese merchant and sold my three beautiful wool blankets I had brought from Japan. I got a fairly good price and with that money I came back to Vancouver.

In Vancouver I stayed at a Japanese inn called the Sekine. It was like a boarding house. If the owner knew you, if you seemed to be an honest person, they would advance the room and board until you had a job. At the Sekine I met a man working at a shingle mill. He asked me if I wanted a job there. I said "Of course". It was a Japanese shinglemill on the boundary of Vancouver and Burnaby. a little east of where Central Park is today. I worked at the shinglemill until the next spring, for seven of eight months. 3.

My work at the shinglemill was to cut cedar logs into blocks for the sawyer. It was an easy kind of logging, not dangerous. We cut down high, left-over cedar stumps - six, eight, ten feet high. We cut up any cedar snags into straight bolts fifty-two inches long. They had to be a uniform size. About twenty-eight bolts to a cord. The pay was not so good but I didn't mind that kind of work. On contract. The thing was being able to set your saw so it was sharp and cut right. That is not so easy to do. They

were long cross-cut saws pulled by one man. People who were skilled at setting their saws could cut two cords easily. Sometimes, on Sunday, I could get somebody to set my saw and I would make two cords too. I worked that whole winter cleaning out stumps in South Vancouver, around the foot of Victoria Drive.

The jobs that most Japanese had those days were fishing, sawmill work, logging, work in pulp mills. Some worked on small farms and some on building railways. There were hardly any other jobs available to us. Japanese only had the bottom jobs. They were not hired for any engineering jobs or professional jobs. The professional associations had rules which excluded orientals. The government accepted all those restrictions by the various associations. Maybe someone could become a merchant or a doctor or a teacher among the Japanese. Those who graduated from university did sawmill work, gardening, fishing and so forth. I was physically quite strong so it was not too bad for me. I used to be an athlete and I liked to work with my body, so it was not too hard for me. But many people who were not used to physical labour in Japan, who came here to live, gave up and went back. I know many such people.

I could not find any suitable city jobs. In those days people like me used to have jobs as waiters, bell boys, gardeners and such. Very demeaning jobs. They were not jobs for me. I am more like a fisherman, so I went fishing. When I started I didn't know anything about fishing. Nothing at all. I learned everything by experience. I heard fishermen talking and it sounded interesting. My native place in Boshu is by the sea. It has very rough water and I was used to waves. Therefore I was not afraid of the sea and I never got seasick.

## **Fishing the Skeena, Logging the Coast**

When I started fishing engine boats were beginning to be used at Steveston. Small engine boats we called 'pon-pon-bun'. But on the Skeena all the fishing boats used oars and sail. First I worked for the Balmoral cannery, 1911 in the springtime. I was there until September. Because I didn't know anything about fishing I was made the partner of another man. We both worked on a cannery boat. A double-ender, twenty-eight feet long and five, maybe six, feet wide. They were open boats, no cabin, with two fishermen on each boat. Almost all the fishermen worked on cannery sail boats.

When you are fishing the sail was folded in. The sail was used only to run. When we had a good wind those boats went very fast too. According to the wind, we could make the sail bigger or smaller. Only when the wind is not very strong do we put out full sail. There is a centreboard in the boat so you can sail in a straight line even if the wind is coming from the side. But if it is coming from the front we have to zig zag a lot to get where we're going. The sail is very simple. Just some canvas and rope, some poles and a few pieces of iron. Usually there is somebody at the cannery who does the sailmaking work but we can repair it ourselves if we have to. I did not have any dangerous experiences with those sailboats. Those boats did not upset very easily. Just at the foot of the mountain; very strong gusts of wind can come up suddenly. That kind of wind can overturn a sailboat. But even if it does go over, the sail and mast are in the water and that keeps it from turning right over.

When you get to where you are going to fish you fold in the sail and the partner rows the boat. He is called the boat puller. The other man is the netman, he sets the net. But my boss was physically weak. So I did the rowing and I did a lot of the net work. We divided the boat into half. From the centre to the bow was for rowing and for us to live and cook in. From the centre to the stern was for the fish and for working the net, the gillnet. Those were all gillnet boats. Taking in the net by hand was very hard work unless you were young and strong. During the time of sailboat fishing all the fishermen were

younger than fifty. People over fifty cannot do that hard work for long.

The canneries had engine boats (tow boats) that pulled twenty or more fishing boats to the fishing grounds. The fishermen can ask the engine boat to take them to the spot they want to fish. Once we are out at sea we stay out. A fish collector, an engine boat from the cannery, came to certain spots every day to take the fish caught. That time we used to fish six days of the week and came back to camp only on Sunday. Nowadays fishing is allowed for two days a week, with five off. Not enough fish. But we were on the water for up to six days. We cooked and slept on the boat. We cooked rice and we had bean paste, soya sauce, vegetables. We always had lots of fish to eat. I really like fish so it was a feast—there was no trouble to eat well. We had a tank of drinking water. At night we put up a tent to keep us dry when we're sleeping. We tie up a pole from the mast. Either we sleep in the boat with the anchor out or we go on shore if there is a good place to land.

Fishing is very interesting. You have to find the best way to use the net, you have to think how best to use it each time and place. You have to find where to go and when to put in your net in; for high tide and low tide, when the wind is blowing and when it is calm. The best time is usually when the tide is ebb, just before it starts to come in. Also, the hour of high tide is good. If you just put the net in without thinking about it you won't catch many fish. Fishing is quite complicated and that is what is interesting.

In fishing the timing is the most important. Good weather brings better fishing; sunny days are usually better fishing than when there is wind and rain. But most depends on the time and tide. We try to catch the low tide and the high tide. It doesn't matter whether it is morning or evening, night or day. It all depends on tide-time. It changes. So we work together with the tide and there is no night and day. Night doesn't make any difference. I can tell the time and I can tell direction at sea. You learn, it becomes like instinct. Wind, stars, mountains. A fisherman can tell where he is at night. I

never make mistakes in directions. Fishermen don't make such mistakes.

On the Skeena the season starts in May, May for Spring salmon. At that time we got forty-five dollars a month wages from the canneries to fish Springs. We did that from May until the fifteenth of June. For the rest of the season we fished for so much a fish. Sockeye season was from June to August; from the middle of July to August, for three weeks, was the best. During the Sockeye season we fish just in the river, for about seven weeks. Both men had to row. Once we go down the river from our camp we have to stay down until high tide. We can only get up the river on the tide, even with the sail. Going down the river fishermen usually put down their nets twice. Some hard workers put it down as many as five times.

Now they use very thin, almost invisible nylon net. We had thick net made of jute twine but there was sill a lot of fish caught. There are ways to catch more fish. After the first year I became netman myself. We never left the net in the water for more than an hour, often less. If you left those nets in the water too long they lost their shape and attracted a lot of dirt. The dirt makes the twine more visible, the fish can see it. They can see the net. Watching the fish you could see them evading our net. So you pull up the net from time to time to wash out the dirt. That adds a lot to the work you have to do but it increases the catch. That was why Japanese fishermen usually had good catches.

There weren't many white fishermen on the Skeena but there were as many Indian fishermen as Japanese. I think there were about 1,200 Japanese boats [on the North Coast]. B.C.Packers had about 400 of those boats. Fishermen with their own boat and license could sell to any cannery. However, when I started almost everybody - all of the Japanese fishermen - worked under the 'attach system'. The government gave a number of fishing licenses to the canneries. Canneries were issued the license for the Japanese fishermen. In this way they were bound to the different canneries. We could not sell our catch to whatever cannery we wanted until 1927 or so. 4.

Later, Japanese owned their own boats but at the time nobody owned a boat. On the Skeena the canneries didn't allow engine boats. They made an agreement with the government. It was cheaper for the canneries to have sailboats. There was a quota system for licenses. The canneries assigned so many boats for Indian fishermen and so many boats for Japanese fishermen. Japanese fishermen were restricted in the areas they could fish and the gear they could use. White fishermen and Indians didn't have those restrictions. But there were still lots of fish and we made good catches.

The first year I did not do so well. We only caught about 1,500 fish. A lot of fishermen took 3,000. Gradually I learned how to fish and soon I could catch 3,000 up to 3,500 fish in a season. That was my average in those years. On the Skeena, Sockeye comes back every year but there are big runs every four years. There are some years which are particularly good. In those years cannery sets the number of fish they buy from each boat. Two hundred pieces a day was all they could take. So we would work only half the day, Good fishermen would put down just half the net because you might catch over two hundred fish at one time in a full net. Usually, fishing was not that easy. Some years it was less. Gradually the catches went down and some years later it was difficult to get that many. In the 1920s, 1,700 fish or so a season was the average for Japanese fishermen.

Prices? They were about the same in all the canneries. Fish prices did not change very much for years. Sockeye salmon, that was the main fish for most of the canneries. Sockeye was twelve and a half cents a fish. Humps [Humpback salmon] only one cent. Dog salmon, a big one, maybe three cents. Spring salmon was twelve cents if over ten pounds. Some call them Chinook salmon. Under ten pounds is called Jack salmon and was five cents a fish. Red springs were fifty cents; they're taken during the first of the season. They used to preserve them in barrels with salt and send them to England. All the rest were canned. White springs were only ten cents a fish. A few times we caught a salmon of about a hundred pounds and got a few dollars for it. But that was rare.

In terms of yearly income, workers in sawmills and pulp mills could earn more money than fishermen. But in terms of short period income fishing was the best money. I could make one hundred and fifty dollars by the end of the season after the fares up to the Skeena and all the expenses and food was subtracted. Sometimes a little more. But fishing has ups and downs. In a poor season I sometimes only had ten or twenty dollars left at the end of the season. I worked in other jobs but I like fishing best.

There was one strike during that time. At Balmoral cannery, in 1917 I think. It was a strike of Spring salmon fishermen. Japanese fished Springs for the canneries while Indian fishermen just fished Sockeye then. Only Balmoral and Claxton canneries processed Spring salmon. I didn't participate directly because at the time I worked at the Standard cannery camp for Sockeye fishing.

About fifty fishermen participated in that strike. They said to the company that if they don't increase the prices they would leave the cannery. The company was worried because they would have lost the Sockeye season, because these Spring salmon fishermen also fish Sockeye when the season starts. The cannery gave a small increase in the price but the fishermen who participated did not gain anything that season, they lost in fact. But it was good for the future. Because the canneries did not pay us so badly after that. Shozo Tani was the main leader of the strikers. He was fired from the Balmoral cannery but he came to our Sockeye camp and worked there after that.

There were more than a dozen canneries on the Skeena then. Many companies - B.C. Packers, Cassiar Company, A.B.C. Fishing Company and others. I forget the names now but B.C. Packers was the biggest of them. At that time the canneries were almost all British capital. The main market was England. Later American money came in. But oriental workers had only the lowest jobs. All the canneries who had Japanese fishermen had a Japanese 'boss'. although he did not recruit the fishermen, not until the 'attach system' was lifted. The canneries let that boss make the arrangements for the

fishermen. He arranged for food and housing and laundry. He would see that those men who wanted to fish took out the boats and that others would work in the camp mending nets and such work. But he did not have the power to hire and fire fishermen.

A fishing boss had to be a respectable person. A cannery changed a boss who was not very popular. His reputation was dependant on how he got on with the boys. In those days the boss was the only one who had his wife in the camp. His reputation was also dependant on his wife's cooking. She would have to do the laundry. Can you imagine a wife doing the laundry for all those men ?

The fishing boss received everybody's income from the cannery, depending on what they caught. Most of those first generation fishermen couldn't speak English. In my experience, the fishing boss did not receive any kickback from the fishermen, not in the fishing camps. Elsewhere there were some very bad bosses. The fishing boss lived in the camp through the whole winter with his family. He would order enough food for the fishing season and anything that was left over was for his use. The fishermen in the camp paid for that but it was not a large amount.

When the fishing season was over, at the end of September, all the fishermen went back to town by steamship. Then that country was empty until next spring. The Indian fishermen went back to their villages and the Japanese fishermen went to Vancouver. The camps and the canneries were almost deserted. There were not many people living in the Skeena area besides fishermen, some loggers, that's about it. If you went up the Skeena quite a ways there was some settlements but Prince Rupert was the only town, a little town of maybe 5,000 people. They finished working on the railway [the Grand Trunk Pacific] when I was there. It was a town of fishermen and shipping. Some Japanese fishermen lived there but most came down to Vancouver.

In 1913 I started my logging jobs. During those years I spent every year the same way. In the summer, from June to September, I did salmon fishing on the Skeena. When the fishing season was over I went to the logging

camps until the next fishing season opened. In between I came to Vancouver, Sometimes I went to the same logging camp, sometimes to a different one every year. One winter I worked cutting shingle bolts.

The first place I worked logging was near Chemainus, for a Japanese camp in the mountains. A small camp of about thirty people. We moved following our work. When we finished logging one spot we moved to another spot, going into the mountains on the logging railway. There was a white people's logging camp nearby with over two hundred men. That was all work for the big sawmill in Chemainus owned by the Victoria Lumber Company. Victoria Lumber Company at Chemainus and Fraser Mills near New Westminster were the two biggest mills in Canada at the time.

I was a faller. That was what I always did in the logging camps. Everything was done by hand, with a saw, with an axe. First you make the undercut, then you saw through the tree. I liked falling too. You have to always think how to do it, think about the various ways to fall the tree. Think where to and how to fall that tree. If you fall it in the wrong place it gets wasted. It gets broken up or it is hard to get at and the buckers will find it difficult to cut into logs. If the faller does it right then the buckers can cut up the tree easily with no danger. That was logger's work, that was my job.

We worked in shifts. A shift consists of four people, two buckers and two fallers. The buckers cut up the tree into lengths of twenty-two, twenty-eight, thirty foot long logs. Depending on the type of tree it is, what it is like and so forth. They try to get the best lengths out of it; sometimes three logs, sometimes two in a tree. After we finished logging our section we move on and the donkeys [donkey steam engines] and train come in. The logs are pulled to one spot by the chain, piled up and pulled out by donkey force. Later they are loaded on a train and the logs are carried to the beach and dropped into the salt water. In some camps I worked they could take the wire from the donkey out to where the logging was, hook on and pull the logs right into the sea. From there they go to the sawmill.

Falling is dangerous work. Working at the bottom of the tree you have to be careful about falling branches and pieces of the tree that come loose. The worst accidents happened when the tree came down wrong. Many accidents happened but I was never injured myself. Lucky I guess. There were many people I knew who died in logging accidents. The way they died, usually, was to be hit by a tree. Mr.Akasaka, a man ten years older than me, was working on my shift. He was a buckler and I was falling. The tree I felled bounced back and hit another tree and that tree fell over and crushed Mr.Akasaka. His head was all crushed, he was killed instantly. 5

The company said that because he was smoking a cigarette he was not working and watching out. So his family didn't get any compensation. Our boss went and argued with the company saying that Mr.Akasaka was waiting in a safety spot after the timber call was made and that that his family should get compensation. But the company said 'No'. They treated workers very badly. That happened when I was working on Texada Island in front of Powell River.

The closest escape I myself had was once when I was falling a tree on the edge of a sort of cliff. It was very thin soil, all rock, and the roots did not go deep. It was a pine tree, I think, and there was a big cedar leaning on it. It was difficult to fall but it was a beautiful tree with lots of lumber in it. Since we had a contract we had to cut all the saleable timber off our piece of ground. Well, I'm left handed. When I use the saw I can pick a spot to work that suits me. But when I use the axe, a left handed person sometimes stands in the wrong place to get the saw out.

After me and my partner pulled the saw out we cut the last strip holding the tree with axes. I was chopping and the tree started to fall. I had a spot picked out I was going to run to. But the leaning cedar started to slide down. It lifted its roots, huge roots, right in front of me, I jumped to one side. Fortunately there was a deep crevice in the rock and I hid myself in that. The tree fell right over me. It was a huge tree, maybe five feet thick. Without the crevice I would have been crushed. The

people I was working with thought I must be dead and started to call the others. They were very surprised when they found me lying underneath, alive. Sure I was scared. But I liked logging, I liked that sort of work when I was young and strong.

From 1913 to 1919 I was in many different logging camps between fishing seasons on the Skeena. I worked in various camps for the Victoria Lumber Company for three years. One winter I was in a white camp and I worked with white men and ate with white men. The rest were Japanese camps. Two winters I worked for other logging companies along the coast, they were Japanese logging contractors. The biggest Japanese logging company was owned by Mr Kagetsu. He was a very rich man and had a sawmill and owned a mountain of timber near Fanny Bay. But I never worked for him. One winter I worked for a shingle mill on Seymour Creek, in North Vancouver. About twenty Japanese in my camp and about fifty in another one. That is probably all houses now, where we logged.

No, I was never a contractor or a boss. I worked as a logger and a fisherman. Most of the time I moved from one camp to another every season. We worked for ten hours a day in some of those logging camps, one hour off to eat. Later it was eight hours a day. Sometimes it was dark when we got up and dark when we came back from work. Six days a week. The camp might close down for a while and we could rest or go to town. Sometimes people got sick or weak and were sent to town, but not so many. We were all very healthy and young.

The wage was not too bad for that time. Fallers got up to forty cents an hour, thirty cents in some camps. That was quite a bit of money. That was when you could buy a big beef steak dinner with coffee and everything in a restaurant for twenty cents. Logging gave the highest wages we could get, then fishing. Work on the railways and gardening and such was the lowest pay. Once you were a logger and a fisherman you didn't want to do such other jobs.

In logging camps the company or contractor operated the camp. If the camp was big the owner sometimes got a Japanese boss to recruit workers. In that case the boss

had more power than a boss in a fishing camp. He could give promotions and better and worse jobs or fire men if they did not work hard enough. He also negotiated on the workers' wages with the white employer. So much for this 'boy', so much for that 'boy'. The wages at logging camps were not standardized. Therefore the boss in a logging camp had more power than one at a sawmill or fishing camp.

The company that operated the logging camp hired the cook and supplied the food. Accommodation was free but we had to pay so much for the food. At Chemainus we lived in tents, even in winter. Sometimes we lived in bunkhouses; maybe as many as forty men all in one big room. We made our own beds and furniture. Sometimes, in small camps, we built our own shacks to live in. We could put up a shack in two days. Many of the people working in the camps intended to save money and return to Japan so they wanted to spend the minimum on food. If they could influence the contractor to spend less on food they paid less board. In those camps the food was always terrible. Some camps had quite good food, if the boss of the logging camp brought his wife to cook.

Logging work always makes you very hungry. I used to eat five or six bowls of rice for supper. We ate rice morning, lunch and supper. Breakfast would be soup, pickles and rice. That's about it. For lunch, rice balls and sometimes roast. That was very good. We took lunch along with us to work. Dinner was usually meat and rice. There was trouble keeping the meat when it was warm and sometimes it would start to go bad. We didn't get fish very often but the amount of the food was always enough.

The first four or five years I went logging there were only men in the camp. Without women around men get wild. Camps were always full of fights - fights and gambling. Men played cards, especially Black Jack. Fights would start over gambling. I hardly played cards since I did not like to gamble but some people in those camps gambled from supper until it was time to go to bed.

We were all about the same age, young men of twenty-two or twenty-six or so. Hardly anybody over thirty-five and no Nisei at all. The memory of their families and

what they had been doing at home haunted them all the time. At that time many of the people who came to Canada were young men from farming villages. Most were farmers' sons. There were hardly any city people among them. Many came from Hiroshima, Miyagi, Fukuoka and Shinga [Prefectures], but not many from Chiba. Many planned to go back to their own places after they saved so much money. That was their aim. But they were usually far from reaching their goal. They ended up inviting a wife from Japan and settled in Canada. At first, I think all of them thought that Canada would be only a temporary residence. I am one of them.

We were almost totally separated from white society, especially those who worked in the camps. While I was in a camp I did not know what was happening outside at all. When I came to town I would follow the news of the world. But in the camps there were hardly any newspapers.

Many of the people I worked with could not read or write Japanese. Sometimes they would Ask me to read them articles from magazines and newspapers after work. Some men would ask me to write letters for them. For instance, I wrote love letters to their fiances in Japan. What kind of things did they want me to write? Well, they were just the same as any love letters by young men. They wanted me to day good things about their life in Canada so that their fiances would marry them and come over.

They were picture brides. I met one of their fiances later. She was embarrassed to find out that I was the person who read and answered her love letters. There were no single Japanese women in Canada then. A man would exchange pictures and correspondence with a possible bride and if they decided to marry they could marry on a document. The husband brought the bride to Canada. Later that became illegal. City people didn't do that much, these were mainly farmers' sons. They were simple and honest people, they were good people as friends. They were different from the people I used to know in Japan as a student. They were not the type of people who spoke about the meaning of life and so on.

We talked about women and drinking and fights and what they hoped to do.

The only recreation was to go to town. There was no liquor in the camp, not very often. So when we went to town we had a lot of drinks. We came to Chemainus by logging railway. When I could get it I drank sake. At the time Japanese sake was thirty-five cents for a quart bottle but there were only two stores that sold it. I drank a lot. Whenever I came to Vancouver I used up my money drinking. I went to work and came back to town again and drank until I was broke. That was my life. When I was in Japan I didn't drink that much. I started to drink a lot after I came to Canada. There were no other pleasures. I was twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven when I worked around Chemainus,

In the old days, workers, when they came out to Vancouver with money, used to treat other people. That's what I did. I never drank by myself. If I had the money I would always invite somebody to drink with me. I enjoyed conversation. When I got drunk I talked a lot. There were not many people I could talk to about my thoughts. That was always so for people who came in from working in the camps. All the people in the Labour Union were strong drinkers. All my drinking friends are dead now. They are all dead. I'm the only one surviving.

### **The Labour Union and the *Daily People*.**

In 1919 I did not go logging. After the fishing season that year I stayed in town. Early in the spring I took a job at Ocean Falls which was one of the biggest papermills in B.C. For two years I fished on the Skeena in the summer and worked at Ocean Falls in the winter. I was a longshoreman there; we loaded the ships with different kinds of paper made by the mill. Paper comes in big rolls, up to a ton. We had hand trucks and machines to load the ships and I did not think that longshoring was too tough. But it was not a particularly good job. Quite

monotonous and you work in a gang. There were about 1,700 or 1,800 people working at Ocean Falls then. In the mill, Japanese and whites did the same kinds of work. There were about five hundred Japanese workers at Ocean Falls, the largest number of at any one place in B.C.

We were hired by the company and paid our wages by the company but there were two Japanese bosses in charge of accommodations. They could speak a little English and they were kind of strong characters. After a while we realized that they were cheating on the food. The boss told the company, 'So much for the food this month' and the company deducted that from our wages. I got about fifty dollars a month and out of that eighteen or nineteen dollars was deducted for food. A high prices for very cheap food. It only cost the boss twelve dollars a man at most. So we requested the company to let the boys themselves look after buying the food and accounting. After a while they agreed.

Five hundred Japanese working there; with five or six dollars profit a month on the food the boss was making a lot of money. On top of it he got commissions from the stores they bought the food at. So they could make profit from the boys' food money and commission from the shops. Those sorts of bosses always become rich. Not all were like that but the main purpose in becoming a boss was to make money. They were very angry when they lost the right to collect our food money.

There was another papermill near Ocean Falls called Swanson Bay. In 1919 the Japanese workers in that mill went on strike and were all fired. These people all came down to town and organized the Labour Union (Nihonjin Rodo Kumiai). The membership was only about seventy of eighty people to start with but the Labour Union accepted any worker who wished to join. Any Japanese worker-logger, papermill workers, labourer, fisherman, laundry worker. It took the form of a general union of all Japanese workers. Japanese workers were too few, too scattered, in most industries to organize separately. We were isolated from the white unionists. Therefore it was not possible to develop a union according to occupations. It could not be an ordinary labour union.

The person most responsible for establishing the Labour Union was a man called Etsu Suzuki. He was a writer for the *Continental Times* (*Tairiku Nippo*) in Vancouver who was already known for his views. He became the consultant of those men from Swanson Bay who started the Labour Union. The Anti-Asiatic League was started to become very influential; discrimination against orientals was worsening. Suzuki thought that if the Japanese workers formed a union, then it would be possible to approach the white unions and slow down the anti-oriental movement.

Suzuki was not really a socialist, I think. He was more of a liberal of the 'Taisho Democracy' period. No, not like the Liberal party here at all. He was fighting for justice but he was not a labourer himself. I was more of a socialist, more or less. When I was at the university I didn't think about politics very much although socialism was talked about already in Japan. I read some socialist books like those of Toshihiko Sakai, Abe's writings, Hajime Kawakami's books. They were quite mild socialists. But it was only after I came to Canada and worked in camps that I was really influenced by socialism. Seeing how the companies and bosses exploited workers. In Japan I was still a student and I didn't realize all that oppression, it was just reading and talk. But after I came to Canada and I myself became a labourer, then I realized it. I really felt it. There was no particular incident that convinced me before I joined the Labour Union. 6.

No, I was not influenced by the Russian revolution. I talked about the Russian revolution with my friends but I didn't think it would have much effect on the Japanese worker in Canada. I think it gave some impetus to white unions and that affected the Japanese indirectly. Those years, 1917, 1918, 1919, a lot of white unions became very active. People who were seriously influenced by the Russian revolution realized they could not discriminate against Japanese just because of the colour of their faces. They argued that within their own unions. That activity influenced me and others to actually do something in practice.

It was the time of the 'Taisho Democracy' (c.1912-1926) in Japan. The Taisho democracy developed from the previous very repressed Meiji ground. For a time the pressure on different opinions was lessened and different Japanese socialists came forward. There was a bookstore on Powell street that used to sell translated socialist books. I read translations of some of Marx' books for the first time from that bookstore. That was around 1917, 1918, during the years when the Labour Union got started. So, in the 1920s the Japanese community here was influenced by magazines like *Kaiho* (Liberation) and *Kaizo* (Renovation). Newspapers like the *Continental Times* also started to take a little more liberal position. Before that all the magazines were very conservative. 7.

When the Labour Union was formed it began the publication of a bulletin called *Rodo Shuho* ( Labour weekly). The positions and views of the union were publicized through this weekly and sometimes through articles which Suzuki still wrote in the *Continental Times*. I was a reader of those publications in Ocean Falls in 1920 and I determined to go and meet Suzuki. I came down from Ocean Falls, talked to Suzuki and became a member of the Labour Union. Soon after I was a member Suzuki asked me to take charge of the *Labour Weekly* and I became editor. That is how I settled in Vancouver.

We provided information about Japanese workers in every part of B.C., about the white labour movement and about government policies. Many of such articles were translations from white union newspapers. We attacked the Anti-Asiatic League and the racist politicians in the labour movement. We said taht the function of labour unions was to protect the workers from the capitalists, that discrimination was basically against the prnciples of the labour movement. That was the point which we publicized in our newspaper again and again,

The next years I was very busy in building up the Labour Union and working with the Skeena Fishermen's Association. I was always busy, giving talks, going to meetings, doing research and writing. I did the editing for the *Labour Weekly* in my spare time.

Since I had worked in many camps over ten years and knew many people I thought it would not be difficult for us to increase the membership of the Labour Union. I was optimistic that a hundred new members should be easy to get. However it was not so easy. In 1920 I visited all the camps where Japanese were working. I travelled around B.C. for three months with little success. It was difficult to collect the three dollar membership fee. Those who paid a fee to the Japanese Association did not want to pay another fee to the Labour Union. Many said, 'I'm going back to Japan soon'. That was the standard reply.

The Japanese Association (Nihon Jinkai) used to be dominated by the Japanese Consul and run by merchants and such people. They were in all the executive positions. Most Japanese organizations were branches of the Japanese Association. The only exception was the Steveston Fishermen's Association. The people who ran the Japanese Association? Well, for instance, an owner of a fish store was in charge of looking after the affairs of the fishermen on the Skeena. Loggers' affairs were in the hands of a loggers' boss in Vancouver and agricultural matters were in the hands of a fertilizer merchant.

The Japanese Association had an important influence over the life of Japanese living in Canada. As long as the Japanese Association followed the Consul's ideas it had 'guarantor authority'; it could give authorized approval for legal documents. For instance, there were many Issei living here who were still liable for the draft in Japan. If you did not get the Consul's permission you would have to return to be drafted in Japan. The Consul had control over visas. On applying to bring wives to Canada one needed the Association's approval. On many things that needed the Consul's approval one had to apply to the Japanese Association. But they did nothing for the Japanese worker here.

Suzuki and I reached the conclusion, the Labor Union reached the view, that the Japanese Association was an obstacle. That it was absolutely necessary to break its control over the Japanese here. We discussed how to deal with the Japanese Association but the Labour Union

did not not have any power then. All we did was criticize in our paper, which did not change anything. There was already dissatisfaction with the Japanese Association among the Skeena Fishermen's Association. We used to operate a hospital on the Skeena during the fishing season that cost \$4,500 a year. Although we paid fees to the Japanese Association they would give us no help with that hospital. It was difficult to keep up. I was the representative of the Skeena fishermen who came down to Vancouver in the winter; the Skeena Fishermen's Association had about 2,200 or 2,300 members and the Steveston Fishermen's Association had about 1,500 members then. We had reached the conclusion that we could do something about the Japanese Association if the fishermen gave us support.

That year, 1921, I went to the Skeena very early. I visited all the canneries and fishing camps to convince fishermen that it was necessary to have an independent organization to negotiate with the canneries and with the white fishermen's union on various matters. I talked about the problem of fees. We proposed to make the various Japanese organizations independent of the Japanese Association. We were going to begin organizing a Liaison Council of all Japanese fishermen. The general meeting of the Skeena fishermen supported that proposal and gave me authority to represent them in forming such an organization.

I went down to Steveston but the Steveston people were not willing to listen. They were very conservative and they already had an independent organization. They accused us of causing trouble within the Japanese community. I went to the fishermen in No.3 district, around Vancouver Island. After some travelling and meetings they said they would give us their support. Then Mr. Yamazaki of the *Continental Times* convinced the leaders of the Steveston Fishermen's Association to meet with us. The result was the establishment of the Fishermen's Liaison Council, although most of the Steveston people were far from convinced.

At one of the meetings of the Fishermen's Liaison Council I proposed the program to abolish membership in the Japanese Association. We notified the other

branches of the Association and held a big meeting on the proposal. Suzuki was there three days talking, defeating all the objections to reorganization. He was the most eloquent speaker I ever heard. Although Steveston was still in opposition we now had many people on our side, we had the majority on our side. We voted to make the Fishermen's Liaison Council and the fishermen's associations independent of the Japanese Association. Because the fishermen were the most numerous it was a big blow to the Association. At that point the original executive board of the Japanese Association resigned and was replaced by members of the Fishermen's Liaison Council and supporters of the Labour Union. We had the majority and we made the different branches independent. After that membership in the Labour Union increased a lot.

During that time anti-Japanese discrimination was becoming very intense. The executive of the old Japanese Association were very angry with us but they didn't know where to turn. But when the Labour Union started attacking the Japanese bosses they began to fight back. They claimed we were all reds controlled by Suzuki. I travelled all over B.C. to gather material and write about the conditions of Japanese workers. The Labour Union supporters were controlling the Japanese Association and if provided me with seventy-five dollars a month wage to do that research. I did that for nine months.

I discovered that the Furuya company, a large labour contractor, was charging thirty percent commissions on food and merchandise to Japanese railway workers. Those men came to me and requested that the Labour Union take some action, although they weren't members. I reported this and the findings of other such things in the *Labour Weekly*. I was also able to have the editor of the *Continental Times*, Mr. Osada, publish part of that report.

The general manager of the Furuya Company came to Vancouver from Seattle to complain to Yamazaki, the owner of the *Continental Times*. The Japanese Board of Trade in Vancouver also complained and demanded that any further articles like that be cancelled. Yamazaki was

surprised to see that article; I think he hardly read his own newspaper. 'I have given you support before' but please refrain from writing any more of those articles' he said to me. It was a very long report of many articles. We sent out copies and all the Japanese organizations had a copy but they are all lost now. Even my own copy was lost when we had to move during the war.

I was not going to leave them unfinished but Yamazaki said, 'You will not publish them in my paper'. We used the press of the *Continental Times* to publish the *Labour Weekly*. They refused to print the *Labour Weekly* anymore. Then the *Labour Weekly* was printed by a job printer on Powell street. The main customers of that printer were members of the Japanese Board of Trade and they told him that they would not give him jobs if he continued to print the *Labour Weekly*. So he stopped printing our paper; for a while there was no *Labour Weekly*.

We discussed the possibility of operating our own press but we could not survive as only a weekly newspaper. Then we thought of publishing a daily newspaper. We estimated that we needed about \$10,000 to start with. We had to get about 1,500 subscriptions and some advertisements. That was a huge sum of money at the time. We were very optimistic because at that times the Labour Union had only one hundred and fifty dollars in its account. At a general meeting of the Labour Union it was agreed to publish the paper on the condition that someone be responsible for it on a full-time basis. I became the manager for the first two years.

We started to collect contributions for the new newspaper and were quite successful. We bought a secondhand press and ordered type from Japan and started publishing in May 1924. During that time I was travelling all over B.C. to get contributions and subscribers. I was hardly home at all.

The name of our paper was *The Daily People* (*Minshu*) and it belonged to and was directed by the Labour Union. It was a daily and took the form of a regular newspaper into which the views of a union paper were woven. The main objects of *The Daily People* were to combat anti-Japanese discrimination and to make

Japanese workers more aware of the principles of the Labour Union. We put in articles against Japanese bosses who exploited workers and merchants who charged high food commissions.

There were three Japanese newspapers in Vancouver then - *The Daily People*, the *Continental Times*, and the *Canada Shimpō*. *Canada Shimpō* was very conservative. It was established by Kagetsu, that big sawmill owner. It had the support of most of the merchants because the *Continental Times* didn't defend them strongly enough. The *Continental Times* was fairly progressive for an ordinary newspaper, depending on the topic. When Suzuki left the *Continental Times* to write for the *Daily People* a lot of their subscribers came over to us.

Those three papers were very different. On some incidents, such as a murder of instance, they wrote similar articles. But if the topic was concerning work the three papers wrote completely different accounts. If there was a strike the *Canada Shimpō* would not mention it or it wrote only criticism: 'Delinquent workers strike and make trouble for their employers' etcetera. The subscribers were merchants and people of very conservative ideas, including workers. There were a lot of workers opposed to the ideas of *The Daily People*. *The Continental Times* usually gave some plain information without too much comment. It was bought by a man who made it into a 'popular' paper; it published a lot of trivial stories but it became the biggest newspaper. *The Daily People* was a union paper and could not become soft. On strikes and labour problems *The People* was the only one that gave thorough coverage.

Suzuki was our most influential writer on *The Daily People*.

Suzuki was a year older than me, a very skilful writer. He could listen and talk and write on any topic. He understood things well and he listened to other people well. If he realized he was wrong he corrected his views; he wasn't stubborn at all. The best thing was that he was very good at writing and a very eloquent speaker. Not really a scholar but such a talent that he must have been a born speaker. He was a little timid in person but

the best thing was that when he was speaking to an audience or writing he would be absolutely ruthless in saying what he believed.

Suzuki had worked on the *Tokyo Asahi* newspaper before he came to Canada. In Tokyo he fell in love with Toshiko Tamura. Toshiko Tamura was a very popular novelist during the Meiji era. She was already writing in her teens and I read her novels when I was still in Japan. She separated from her husband and in 1917 she and Suzuki eloped to Canada. They were later married in Vancouver. I was a witness at their wedding. That famous writer was Suzuki's wife. Toshiko used to write for *The Daily People* sometimes but after she left Japan she was no longer able to write novels. 8.

Toshiko was a very progressive woman, she was called 'a modern woman'. Well, 'modern' means having her independence, for instance, and her kinds of relationships to men. She didn't pay attention to what the world would say about her. That was very different from most other women in those days. Nowadays women can do a lot of things but at that time there were thousands of things they weren't supposed to do. They used to stay home or work in their husband's shop maybe. But Toshiko used to go out to parties at Japanese restaurants. She didn't drink herself but she didn't hesitate to talk to men, quite equally. even in places where men drank. She could talk to men without reservation. She did that kind of thing.

Her best friend here in Vancouver was a midwife and another friend was a dressmaker with her own shop. She used to visit them and stay overnight. They were kind of progressive women too. What did I think of them? Well. I didn't think they were strange. I took them for granted. They were good women. I myself got a Meiji education but I was a bit different from most other men. I was a good friend of Toshiko.

People used to invite Suzuki to drink. He was very good at conversation, he was very entertaining and everybody liked him and treated him well. He could speak about anything, talk about anything according to the level and interests of the listener. He could pick up the topic from anything. We had many disagreements in

the years we worked together but sooner or later we always resolved them. Suzuki didn't care about being poor himself. He never had any money. He might have fifty cents in his pocket, that was all. That was a good point and also a bad point about him. Because he expected that other people would feel the same way.

I got married in 1922 when I was thirty-five years old. We had our fiftieth wedding anniversary in May 1972. How did I get married ? Well, there's no other way than the ordinary way. I thought of getting married before but I didn't have anybody to marry. I didn't have any particular ideal of a woman in mind, I thought that if she's a good hearted woman that was fine. I first met my wife when she was a a girl, the daughter of a man I used to buy sake from. I didn't think anything about her in particular then - just a young girl. Then I heard that she was married. Later she got separated and was living by herself, doing housework. I got to know her at that time.

*Mrs. Yoshida*

I was still going to school when I first saw Yoshida. My mother died when I was young and I was living with my father and stepmother. My stepmother wanted to get rid of me so they arranged a marriage. I was married when I was sixteen. When I began to realize things I could not stand that marriage. I lived with my first husband for only a short time. We went back to Japan but since I didn't like him I couldn't live with him. That marriage was never registered; it was not legal to marry here without court permission unless the girl was seventeen. Therefore when I separated there was no legal procedure necessary. I was twenty-three when I married Yoshida. Our daughter was born a year later, in 1923 when I was twenty-four. That is a long time ago.

*Ryuichi Yoshida*

Naturally I loved her. I proposed of my own free will. But married life is not all good, it has some drawbacks for a man. A bachelor, he can fly, he can go anywhere. For a man being bound down is a handicap. For instance, when I worked for the Labour Union, as a bachelor it didn't matter if I had no money. You can still live. But with a wife and a child the matter is not so simple. You need money regularly to live.

For a short time I received a wage from the Labour Union and then from *The Daily People*. Fifty to seventy dollars a month. That is I was supposed to receive that wage but mostly it wasn't paid because the Labour Union had no money. So it was very difficult for us financially. I only got just enough for food. We lived on debts. For about two years, almost three years, we shared an apartment with Suzuki and Toshiko. It was communal living.

Well, communal life wasn't particularly convenient. Maybe it was economically handy but with two couples living together there are various worries. You always have to be careful and considerate not to annoy each other. Suzuki was a year older than me and Toshiko two years older. She was already a famous person and my wife was still quite young, so naturally there was some friction there.

We rented a small house on Columbia street, near the corner of Columbia and Second avenue. The house isn't there anymore, they completely changed that whole area. The street is still there but now there are only factories. There used to be a lot of Japanese living in that area, in houses and apartment houses, on Fourth avenue, second avenue near Cambie. That was the nest of the Japanese people.

Even if I wanted to make a lot of money it was impossible. Nobody wanted to hire me because of my work with the Labour Union. Unless I had a shop or went fishing it was very difficult for me to find work. We were very poor for quite a while. The rent was always overdue. We sold our household belongings to live, including my wife's new sewing machine. Some of our furniture was seized because we could not pay back the loan we took out on it. But poverty doesn't cause marriage problems so much, I don't think. You can't help poverty.

My wife was very ill after she had the child. The doctor said that she might die if she got pregnant again. Now she very healthy, healthier than at any time in her life. But she was ill a lot in those years. Well. I thought that one child was enough anyway. I didn't have any particular ideas about children. I didn't have any special

idea about what my daughter should be. Of course she was very cute and I felt very affectionate but I didn't do any babysitting. And I was away from home much of the time.

*Mrs. Yoshida*

My husband was always out. He drank a lot; men coming into town treated him to a lot of sake. We were very poor for a long time. But since I married him of my own free will I thought I should bear it. We suffered a lot. Sometimes we didn't have money to buy milk. We used to eat with the Suzuki's. Toshiko looked after me very well because I was sick a lot in those years. But we had quite a different life. While I stayed at home and looked after the baby Toshiko went out. She used to go to the horse races often. My husband didn't take me seriously because I was so many years younger than him. Sometimes he came back drunk at night and I was very angry. But he didn't take me seriously.

*Ryuichi Yoshida*

Suzuki and Toshiko began to argue with each other all the time. One day they were arguing and I was watching them and started to laugh. Toshiko became very angry at me and left the house and said she wouldn't come back until I apologized to her. Whenever they fought Toshiko went out with a suitcase and Suzuki went to apologize and bring were back. Ourselves, my wife and I, we didn't fight. But gradually a personal clash developed between us and the Suzuki's. That was almost inevitable. When two couples live together there is always some emotional conflict. We had a child and the Suzuki's stayed up late. If Suzuki came home drunk at night they would fight.

Finally we got an apartment of our own, a tiny place on the corner of the five hundred block on Powell street. We started a different life and I started a different daily schedule. I had to work harder to support my wife and daughter. I stopped drinking as much. It was less friction. After we had our own place we reconciled with Suzuki and Toshiko without any problem.

I was still active in the Labour Union. The practical problem was that the Labour Union didn't increase in

membership. It was not possible to strengthen the Labour Union because we could not achieve any gains in wages and conditions. Our union, consisting of just some Japanese workers, was too small to achieve any improvements in work conditions and pay. We were too scattered. Without the cooperation of the white unions we could achieve nothing. The white unions were organized by occupation but they did not accept Japanese members usually. Because of that the Labour Union included Japanese workers of all occupations. But our activity was not related to everyday work question. The fishermen had their own organizations and they did not join the Labour Union except as individuals. Those who had socialist views or who supported the labour movement for moral reason were our only continuous supporters.

Yes, we supported strikes of Japanese workers. But there were not many strikes in those years. Even the white union movement was quiet. In 1920 there was a strike at the Alberta Lumber Company in Fairview, by False Creek. The Japanese workers there, about fifty men, went on strike for higher pay. They did not belong to the Labour Union but we supported them anyway. The strike went on for a while but in the end it was not successful. Another strike was in 1925 at Port Alice. The Japanese demanded a raise to the same wages that the white workers were getting. Before that Japanese workers got a lower wage even when doing the same job. All the Japanese workers in that mill joined the strike. They were successful in getting that raise but all of their leaders were fired. Shibata, one of the leaders, used to visit my house at the time. Another leader of Kobayashi. He was deported by the Immigration Department at the end of that strike. The Labour Union supported that strike too and tried to convince workers not to go back until the leaders were rehired. But they didn't do that.

We didn't accomplish much. In general it seems that people were uninterested in any kind of union organization. The Labour Union would have had over 6,000 members if all the fishermen and loggers had joined. We had 1,600 members; somewhat more if you count those who sympathized with us. Actually, only a

small number were active members. The Skeena Fishermen's Association also supported us. But it was impossible. In the city it was almost impossible to organize Japanese workers. Just individuals of our persuasion joined us.

As soon as the Labour Union was formed it started to work toward joining the Vancouver Labour Council. We expected to work together with the white unions. We agreed that the Labour Union would support strikes as long as members of the Labour Union were involved in that industry. But there were no such strikes where our support was needed, except for fishing. We constantly interviewed the executive of the Vancouver Labour Council and expressed our desire to join. We asked for a chance to express ourselves at their general meeting every year. We said something like this; 'We are workers too and we would like to become part of the labour movement and join the Council. So far we have been placed between the capitalists and the white workers. Sometimes this has caused troubles to white unions. You can prevent occurrences of such incidents by letting us join the Council and giving us guidance.' The executive of the Vancouver Labour Council did not dismiss us openly but it was known that many of them were strongly connected with the Anti-Asiatic League.

The Anti-Asiatic League blamed the Japanese for unemployment and for low pay, they blamed the Japanese for working for low pay. They blamed us for everything. I was not here when the League was formed but it was very strong after the [First World] war. There was a general anti-oriental feeling in B.C. but it was the Anti-Asiatic League that led the open attacks. They had no thoughts or policy, only to be against orientals. I don't know why they were so fanatical.

In 1926, after six years, the Labour Union was admitted to the Vancouver Labour Council as the [Japanese] Camp and Millworkers Union. We worked closely with the 'C.C.F.' people like Ernest Winch. Angus McInnes was especially helpful to the Labour Union. They were important in the labour movement. They gave us a real hand; gave us advice and argued within their own unions.

The Vancouver Labour Council quit its support of the Anti-Asiatic and soon after that the League was dissolved. That we not due to our work in the Labour Union. The truth might be that anti-oriental feeling was so widespread by then that the League was no longer necessary. Now politicians and the government spread racism. Now discrimination came not mainly from the unions but from the general public. Politicians took advantage of that feeling to get themselves elected. They had no policy or platform, just hatred of Japanese, just discrimination against orientals. And they won elections. There were tons of these candidates, both Liberals and Conservatives. Most of them are dead or retired now. That man from Vancouver South, Green something or other, he was the last of that period, I am very forgetful of names these days.

Even Japanese born here could not vote. There were laws passed that barred Japanese from contract work in the government forests. We were barred from many jobs through exclusion rules. Then the Provincial government convinced the Federal government to cut off the licenses for Japanese fishermen. The Japanese Fishermen's Association carried on a court case for years against that. Finally it came to the Privy Council, with a favorable decision. But in 1928 half the Japanese fishermen had lost their licenses to fish. Only the 'C.C.F.' opposed discrimination as a policy. They did not defend the Japanese because they liked Japanese; that is a big mistake if you believe that. There were a lot of workers who hated the Japanese but who supported socialism. The 'C.C.F.' opposed racism in view of their ideological principles. 9

## Difficult Times

As all this was going on we received a bad attack from the former executive of the Japanese Association. The Japanese Consul, Mr. Gomyo, had been understanding

about the Labour Union and had some progressive attitudes. In the summer of 1926 he was replaced by a new Consul who was very conservative and imperialistic. He thought he should convert the Vancouver Japanese to become ardent nationalists. He soon started to investigate ideological tendencies of the Vancouver Issei. He also intended to give direction on the curriculum of the Japanese language schools to influence the Nisei.

At the end of the year the Consul requested to see the account books of the Japanese Association. He told Suzuki that we should be more respectful to the Japanese Consul. Suzuki was always impatient in such matters and told the Consul that the Japanese Association was an organization registered in Canada and did not have to be subservient to the Consul. Then the Consul brought out a document stipulating that as long as the Association had the authority of guarantor it would be under the supervision of the Consul of Japan. It meant that all the official applications and papers needed for visas and everything was under the control of the Consul. The supporters of the Labour Union soon started to suffer from pressures by the Consul. For instance, he did not give permission to Union members to bring their families from Japan. We continued to control the Japanese Association but we were under great pressure.

The Consul gave instructions that the former directors should work to regain control of the Japanese Association, he gave them all his support. They became very strong and in the next election for the executive they won so many places that there was only one vote difference between them and the supporters of the Labour Union. They persuaded delegates from some local association to oppose all our proposals. With the local delegates they could win every time and our proposals always ended up defeated. Finally, in August 1927, all the Labour Union supporters resigned and the control of the Japanese Association fell back into the hands of the pro-Consul group.

The Labour Union broke with the Japanese Association completely and became separated from the various

associations. The Labour Union was isolated in the Japanese community, with the exception of the Skeena Fishermen's Association, which gave us continuous support. During that time we lost many members and sympathizers. But after 1928 we did not lose too many. When the [Second World] war broke out we still had about 1,200 members.

The Daily People also lost many readers but we remained publishing until 1941. The other two papers profited by that, especially the *Canada Shimpo*. It had a lot of support from the pro-Consul group. Our newspaper was treated as the most hateful enemy, I was notorious. I was accused of being a red or a cheater or a troublemaker or of using the funds of the Japanese Association. I was constantly criticized.

In eliminating the Labour Union's influence from the Japanese Association Mr. Morii and his gang did a great service to the pro-Consul group. Because of this Morii and his group became powerful, until the war started with Japan. Morii owned a gambling house here in Vancouver., he was protected by the police. Morii was quite successful in his gambling business. He was not so greedy but he was extremely ambitious for fame. He gave away a lot of money to win people's favour. You can win almost any kind of position if you have a lot of money and are not greedy. Besides, people in the Japanese community heard various things about Morii which made them afraid. He send his gang to beat up gamblers who did not play in his club. Shopkeepers were asked to donate money to Morii's gang. Restaurants on Powell Street had to give money to protect their businesses, so there would be no trouble with hoodlums. At one time Morii's name 'could stop a baby's cry', as is said. He was a great power. On top of that he began to gain much influence in the Japanese Fishermen's Association. 10

The Union did a lot of lecturing from 1920 to 1926. After that not so much. Maybe everyone was tired. Suzuki and I gave lectures and other people too. Sometimes I talked for two hours. If we had lectures about the ideology of the labour movement the attendance was quite small. Very few, actually. But if we talked about the affairs in the Japanese community itself

we might have as many as eight hundred people come. That was earlier. We were afraid of the rafters breaking. Morii's boys did various things to harass the lecturers. I was one of the main targets but it didn't bother me, I ignored them. I never stopped my speech because of their disturbance. They were just bums.

On the street they didn't bother me. Even Morii was polite when we met on the street. Maybe it was because of my body, I looked quite big and strong. At school I did judo and kendo. After I came to Canada I didn't exercise but because of my work my arms became really big.

I was manager of *The Daily People* for only two years but I did unpaid work for the Labour Union as long as it existed. It took up a great deal of my time. I resigned from the *Daily People* management on what started as a superficial disagreement. I disagreed with the policy of attacking all Japanese 'bosses'. Certainly there were some really vicious bosses who exploited workers with a lot of kickbacks and abused their power. But there were some who were helpful to workers too. Many fishing bosses were good people. I insisted that we had to be careful about attacking Japanese bosses as a whole. I knew very well that many Japanese working outside of town would not be able to find a job with the help of a Japanese boss. I knew this better than Suzuki because I had worked in the camps for ten years and I was quite familiar with what happened in them. The executive of the Labour Union did not agree with me and I became isolated from the executive. As a result I resigned as the manager of *The Daily People*, although I continued to do reporting for the paper when I had time.

The Labour Union was by no means united; we had many tendencies in it. A group developed which started attacking the Labour Union from the inside, about ten or a dozen radicals. They said that the Labour Union was too mild. For instance, the Labour Union ran a co-op store in 1928 and 1929, mainly dealing in food. We sold shares to the members. This 'radical' group said that was no good, it wasn't what the Labour Union should be doing. They also said that the Labour Union's activity should not be to fight against discrimination. We had members who were not exactly labourers, we had

supporters from range of people. There were some people, like laundry store operators, who supported us. They were store owners but they also worked themselves. If they weren't workers themselves then the union didn't include them. But the radicals demanded that these small owners and workers be excluded for the Labour Union. Most of our members didn't agree with that and asked these ten people to leave instead. After leaving the Labour Union these 'radicals' dispersed and the group disappeared. The only thing that they did do was go around individually criticizing the Labour Union.

About ten years before the second war began Japan started to take a hard approach to socialism and Japanese people in Vancouver were influenced by that policy. It began here when the Consul excluded the Labour Union from the Japanese Association. Japanese militarism became even more influential following the Manchurian incident and the war with China (1931-1937).<sup>11</sup> Publications from Japan became very nationalistic so that here was no trace of progressive thought to be seen in them anymore. The problem originally was the education of the Meiji era that the Issei of my generation received in Japan, 'Be faithful to the emperor and love your country'. It was very imperialistic. We were stuffed with nationalistic teaching and military training, I was one of those who received such an education. That was lessened toward the end of the Meiji period and during the Taisho Democracy. But with the coming of the Showa period [1926 and on] the nationalistic spirit quickly became harder.

The Japanese in Canada were very resentful about the discrimination at the same time as they were influenced by Japanese militarism. The more discrimination they received the more dependent they became on Japan. That is clear to me looking at the post-war situation. After the removal of discrimination most Japanese accepted the Canadian way of thinking.

The Labour Union advised people to get adjusted to Canada. We didn't mean that Japanese culture was bad but that we had to adapt in order to stay in Canada. But we were only a minority among the Japanese people. Men working in the camps and the countryside

understood this position better than the Japanese living in town. They were not living in the very close-knit Japanese community so they were not as influenced by community opinion and the old Japanese Association. In town, not many people were in agreement with our position. In town, everybody influence each other. They were very old style Japanese. Maybe the Japanese in Canada were more in that way of thinking than those in Japan. Like the first generation at Steveston. Those people were maintaining the old habits and style that existed in their little villages in Japan. They were not interested in anything new.<sup>12</sup>

We had the support of some loggers, some fishermen, sawmill workers and even some small merchants. All as individuals. But no teachers cooperated with us. They were usually on the side of the old Japanese Association. You know, a large number of the Japanese here then were bachelors. People who were parents were mainly on the side of the Japanese Association. Teachers were conscious of that tendency and of the opinions of the powerful people. People who are respected by society are usually people who don't do anything. People who work and do something usually are not admired by society. That's the way it is.

During those years, until I started fishing again, we had great personal difficulties. My wife's heart condition got very bad for a time. I was afraid that she would die. There was almost no heartbeat sometimes. It lasted for about two years. She took digitalis, which is supposed to be good for a weak heart. But there was no particular treatment, just rest. Today she is fine and I am much weakened. But in those days I was very healthy. If I had a fever or illness of some kind I would go to work and after working I would get better. I inherited a very precious thing from my parents; I received a good body. If I hadn't later worked at that steel mill I would probably be healthy even today.

*Mrs. Yoshida*

For two years I was very sick. I didn't take much in the way of medicine. No medical insurance then. Doctors fees, three dollars a visit. There was rent to pay. So it was a very difficult time. My heart problems started after I

had the child, my physical state got weakened. My heart got worse and worse so when I was twenty-seven, twenty-eight or so, I could not do anything. My husband looked after everything, took care of me and took care of the child. Our daughter had Scarlett fever and the other regular children's diseases but apart from that she was healthy. Since I was sick my husband had to stay home and couldn't go to the Skeena. He did gardening in Vancouver, he cleaned the house and did the cooking. It was very hard for him I think.

*Ryuichi Yoshida*

While my wife was sick I did the housework. We had a very tiny room on 4th avenue. It wasn't so bad. Our daughter was only six or seven. She was a very easy child to look after. She was quiet and didn't cry. Some children are difficult to look after but our daughter was always smiling and friendly - as a child. Now she is quite nervous but as child she was always easygoing. It was alright. But I wasn't used to looking after a household. In those days men worked with men, outside. And women usually had their hands full with the children and the home. That's the way it was.

During that time I did gardening work, for two years. Usually I worked in the construction of new gardens. Building up banks and carrying soil and rocks and timbers. I got that kind to work because I was strong. One of my employers was a rich man with a garden as big as a small farm. In South Vancouver. I built that garden from cutting down the trees to putting in the soil and rocks and streams. I did not like gardening. Handling flowers is not my style, I am more a fisherman or a logger.

I used to be able to make about eighty dollars a month when I worked as a gardener. As the depression got worse people didn't pay me anymore. Fishing wasn't so badly affected it seems. Prices were low before and they stayed low. But at least you could make a living at it. So when my wife was a bit better I decided to go fishing again. I hadn't done fishing for a long time so I couldn't get a license at first. There was a quota on licenses for Japanese fishermen. I had been a Canadian citizen for

almost twenty years, I took out Canadian citizen's papers in 1914 because at that time they made requirements more difficult. But I still could not get a fishing license like white fishermen. Only those Japanese who were veterans from World War One had the same rights as white fishermen. I worked as somebody's partner the first year. The next year I managed to get a license from a man who was quitting fishing.

There were sometimes fights between Japanese and white fishermen on the fishing grounds. I did not hear too much about such conflicts in the Skeena area but in No.1 district there were more troubles. Not in the Steveston area itself but up the coast a bit. Japanese fishermen went to local places where no Japanese lived and the local white fishermen tried to exclude them from fishing. There were a few places like that; Pender Harbour was one.

Gas boats had already started to come in at the Skeena by 1930. White fishermen started to come in after the Japanese fishermen lost their licenses and they used engine-powered fishing boats. The canneries had to change over to boats with gas engines. Most of the boats fishing on the Skeena still belonged to the canneries.

Those early gas boats were different from what you have today. In fact I didn't like them too much; they were dangerous. You turned the engine by hand to start it. Sometimes when you turned the engine it fired back. Fishermen often got their hands broken. Easthope engines and Palmer engines: Palmer engines came from the United States. The gear [the nets and other fishing gear] was still about the same. No power drums, radios or that sort of thing. With those gas boats there was only one man to a boat. Also, the numbers of fish weren't what they were before; 1,700 to 2,000 salmon was a pretty good season's catch. The canneries got bigger and our catch got smaller. Gradually fishing days dropped from six days a week to five days and they four days during the season. Still, I was a good fisherman and I did quite well.

Once I started fishing again I became active in the Skeena Fishermen's Association. I continued my visits to various camps giving talks about the principles of the

labour movement and the Labour Union. I was supposed to help *The Daily People* when I was in town during the winter. I used to leave for the Skeena in the end of March to do net work for the canneries. I repaired nets, tied ropes and floats to the nets and so forth for wages. Then I fished on the Skeena all during the summer. I came down to town at the end of September. So my winter was not too long.

There was a Spring salmon fishermen's strike in district No.1 [Gulf coast area] the year I started back fishing. I don't know too much about it because I was on the Skeena. At the time each local area had its own fishermen's association and made its own negotiations with the canneries. Steveston and the Skeena couldn't strike simultaneously even if there was one organization because the fishing seasons are different. When the main season is over on the Skeena the Steveston run is just starting.

The white fishermen weren't together either. They had a small group in Prince Rupert, more like a fishermen's club than a union. There was another little groups like that at Pender Harbour and one in Victoria, Nanaimo and Vancouver. On the Fraser River I think there were about three different unions of white fishermen negotiating with the canneries on their own. The one at Sunbury, the other side from New Westminster, was the most organized. Only after the war did all these little groups get together in the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. That was the first time that fishermen had some strength to bargain with the canneries.

There was a strike in 1936 on the Skeena. I took part in that. We wanted to get a raise of five cents a fish. The strike was first proposed by Japanese fishermen at Sunnyside Cannery on the Skeena. They were Spring salmon fishermen; they went to different camps to get support. It was first suggested in April. Around Rivers Inlet it was a white fishermen's union that led the strike but on the Skeena the Skeena Fishermen's Association was the strongest union. They talked to white fishermen who said they would join if the Japanese fishermen went on strike. A week before the Sockeye season started everything was ready. The strike started the Middle of

June and went on to the middle of July. About 1,200 Japanese fishermen took part.

All the fishermen were together at the start, including all the Indian and white fishermen. As many as 3,000 joined the strike. At Rivers Inlet I think there were many more white and Indian fishermen than Japanese. The reason we lost was that the canneries were very determined. Also, the Indian fishermen left the strike after three weeks, that was the weak link. Japanese fishermen had food supplies already in the fishing camps. White fishermen could get supplies too, they didn't have to depend upon cannery stores. But the Indian fishermen received coupons from the canneries to buy food at the cannery stores. They used to pay back that amount with the fish they caught. When they were on strike they didn't get coupons. The canneries advanced them coupons if they would go back fishing. After about three weeks they couldn't stand it anymore and they started back to fish. The picket boats scared them off at first but then the canneries sent out men with rifles to protect the Indian fishermen. The Indians also had rifles. If the pickets went to the dock to stop them they would be arrested or there would be a fight. I heard that there was some shooting at Rivers Inlet but we never experienced that at the Skeena.

The canneries were successful in getting the Indians to separate from the strike and that was the reason for the defeat. It also was difficult to hold the Japanese fishermen in. It depended on how different fishing bosses acted. By that time the attach system was gone and the fishing bosses were also recruiters; they had more power than before. Some Japanese bosses told their men that if they didn't go fishing they were going to send them down to Vancouver. So at the end the Japanese fishermen were beginning to break the strike too. I went around to speak to people, to ask them to hold on for just a while longer - but it was no use. Finally we had a meeting and stopped the strike. We were all disappointed. We lost most of the season and we only got a raise of one cent a fish.

Suzuki left Vancouver the year I went back fishing. He died in Japan the following year. Just before Suzuki left he

and Toshiko weren't getting along together. But when she heard he died it was a terrible blow to her. My wife stayed with Toshiko until she came back to herself. It was in the winter so I stayed home and looked after our daughter. Toshiko went back to Japan two years later and we never saw her again.

My mother died the same year Suzuki left Vancouver. I was forty-five and when she died and I had a dream of her. After that I had no close relatives in Japan anymore. But children never think that much of their parents. Its no use to expect too much from your children; its wrong when parents want their children to be faithful to them. Like myself, I didn't have any particular thoughts when my father or mother died.

Speaking of parents and children, my daughter was going to school then. She went through school without any trouble. We didn't have any trouble with her at all, she was very easy to raise. We didn't demand any special thing of her. She went to Japanese language school for about two years but that was all. She could understand and speak Japanese quite well but she couldn't read or write it very much. She enjoyed playing more than study. We let her have her way.

It is impossible to discard Japanese habits for our generation. But I did not think that the generation born here should be indoctrinated with Japanese culture. It's not necessarily bad that the Nisei drop Japanese customs when they live in Canada. So in raising my daughter I did not insist that she adopt Japanese habits. That's difficult, you can't do much about that anyway. I have warm feelings about Japanese ways but I don't think that they are better than any other. They may be good to keep but if we have to discard them, its alright for the next generation. Those generations born here are very different from us. We Issei were basically Japanese but the first generation born here are more than eighty percent Canadian in their outlook and life. A few Nisei were influenced by the Japanese language schools -the Japanese language schools used to teach Japanese history and moral education and how excellent the Japanese people were. So some were influenced.

Our daughter always enjoyed playing more than study. She went through school without any trouble. When she got to high school I expected she would have to study harder but she didn't study at all. For instance, I said to her 'Shouldn't you study for our exams?' And she told me, 'Oh the exam is over'. But she always passed everything okay. Maybe that was not so good, maybe we should have demanded more of her. With my work I was only home half the year. When she was older she ended up going to dances and parties all the time and we didn't know what to do.

Well sure, discrimination affected our personal lives. It is difficult to pick out all the particular incidents and ways we were discriminated against. I always felt that in my personal life, it was a constant thing. Sometimes small things. Like a restaurant called the White Lunch, they didn't allow orientals to work or eat there for years. Sure I was angry. Many Japanese people felt they couldn't do anything about it. When I would say 'we should do this or that' to fight racism people would say, 'No I'm not going to stay here very long' That was always their excuse. But look, almost all who said that stayed in Canada the rest of their lives and died here, leaving their children behind, I felt that even if didn't stay in Canada forever we should still try to fight the discrimination against us. I did the best I could in trying to build up the strength of the Labour Union.

## War and the Internment Camps

I was still on the Skeena fishing when the war started with Germany in 1939. I stayed in Vancouver that winter. At the times the Vancouver Japanese were very much influenced by the Showa [period] militarism stemming from Japan. Only a small minority of Issei were not. Various troubles and factions divided the Issei. The Nisei were not so much involved in these troubles. We still continued to publish *The Daily People* but we

had hardly a thousand readers. Most people were hostile towards the Labour Union and our supporters. If I was not a fisherman I could not have made a living. Nobody would have hired me. People like me, who were well know, especially came across much hostility.

The canneries became very busy in producing canned fish and energizers for wartime use. The cannery I worked for, B.C. Packers, had a cod liver oil plant at Lake Bay on Vancouver Island. After the fishing season in 1940 I got a job at that plant, there was a whole camp of Japanese working there. Later I had a job on a boat, a packer. That boat collected cod and dogfish and delivered them to Lake Bay to be made into cod liver oil and fertilizer. The company was trying to increase production rapidly, that was why I was able to get a job on a packer. Before that there were not such jobs available,

I was on the Skeena in 1941 but it was a bad fishing year and I didn't even make the advance money. So I went straight from the Skeena to work on that packer again. I was working on that boat when war broke out with Japan. The captain yelled for me to come up to the bridge to hear what the radio said. It was December eight 1941 when we heard about it.

The next day we got into Nanaimo where the captain was told that any boat with Japanese aboard had to come to Vancouver. At Vancouver a navy boat was waiting in the harbour. They took me off for investigation. They asked me when I entered Canada, what I doing up till that time. They asked about my present job, about my family, if I knew anything about the war, what I thought about it. I told them I had been Canada for over thirty years. I was a naturalized citizen for over twenty-five years and I had never been back to Japan. I said that war was between countries, that I had nothing to do with that, I had no idea about it. After that I was set free.

When I came home the Japanese community was in great confusion. All Japanese fishing boats were towed to an island near New Westminster where they were tied up and later sold. There was a curfew on Japanese, we could not be out at night after eight. We stayed at home.

People who looked suspicious had been arrested. People were afraid of another riot against the Japanese.

What I was afraid of was a riot like in 1907, but worse. Because anti-Japanese feeling was much higher than ever before. I thought that if we did anything to provoke trouble something really horrible would happen. We could all get massacred, women and children too. But fortunately nothing violent happened before we moved out of Vancouver.

All the Japanese associations and groups were dissolved as soon as the war started - the fishermen's unions, the Labour Union, the Japanese Association and so on. All the Japanese language newspapers were banned from publishing; only the *New Canadian* was excepted. I wrote an article in the *New Canadian* saying people stay calm and cooperate with regulations. There were many rumors that the Japanese will have to do this or do that. Things did not remain calm. The Issei were very quiet but some Nisei were furious, protesting that it was unfair to treat them that way when they were born here. Different conflicts began to break out in the Japanese community. Some of the teachers and students of a certain Japanese language school became more extreme nationalists than the Japanese Association. Most of them were sent to special internment camps and they all went back to Japan after the war.

Shortly after a group was formed by Mr. Morii. His gambling house was the office of that group. Government notices were given to the Japanese through that office and requests were forwarded to the government. Some of us didn't want to be associated with Morii. We tried to form a group of naturalized citizens and Nisei. We had no interference. The R.C.M.P. didn't respond to our requests necessarily but they listened to our spokesmen and gave them the government regulations as they came out. Nothing was clear at first.

Then the government decided to collect all Japanese from the countryside together at Hastings Park. People in Vancouver were allowed to wait in their homes. In March [1942] the government issued the announcement that the Japanese had to move east, away from the coast.

Younger Nisei men could go to the east to work. All other men and those Nisei who didn't want to leave their families were to go to road camps and their families to relocation camps. Soon after, the people at Hasting Park were sent away to camps. The R.C.M.P. went around to look for men eligible to work on road camps.

Ourselves, we stored our belongings and moved into a hotel on Powell street. We were allowed to take only 150 pounds of luggage with us to camp- clothing, bedding, cooking utensils and some food. One man we knew had a concrete warehouse in Vancouver. He said that our belongings would be safe there so I and about ten other families stored our things on the second floor. Later, the watchman of that building sold or destroyed most of those things.

The situation was very complicated and in a state of disorder, with things happening all the time. I really didn't have time to feel very much. We didn't own anything, like a boat or a house or a shop. So we didn't have that to worry about. I thought that the only thing was to leave Vancouver as soon as possible. That as soon as we were away from the cities we would be safe.

I was not that worried but at the last moment Morii denounced me to the police as a leader of the trouble-makers. Not many years later he was charged himself for bribing the police. Although that was never proved in court, with the investigation he finally lost all his power and was not heard from again. An R.C.M.P. officer came to the office where I used to spend the days. I suddenly thought that something bad was going to happen to me and I went into hiding. Since there were not so many places I could go I soon saw that I could not hide for long. So I turned myself in. The police didn't question me or anything, they just put me in a cell at Hastings Park. It was quite a comfortable jail because the warder was an old drinking mate of mine and he used to sneak in some liquor for me. My wife didn't have a chance to visit me because she was being sent to Kaslo camp herself.

We left Vancouver at the end of May. All Japanese were gone by the beginning of November. My daughter had just finished high school. I was separated from my

family for about six months after I left Vancouver. My wife and daughter were moved to Kaslo with many other women and children. There were many deserted towns through there at the time and that is where the Japanese people lived during the first five months.

The road camp I was sent to was at Three Valley, about fifteen miles west of Revelstoke. There were only men in those camps. We lived in tents and they gave us plenty of food, more than we could eat. Our job was to make a highway out of a very rough road. We chopped trees and burned them and cleared the right of way. The work was not so hard, less than what I was used to.

At the end of August it was announced that married men should go to New Denver or Hope and build camps to receive their families. Most of my camp left for New Denver. There were already two hundred men at New Denver building houses. Japanese carpenters had been collected to build the sanatorium there, but the family houses were built by amateurs. Soon after, Roseberry [a nearby relocation site] wanted about fifty men to build houses there. So a number of us moved to Roseberry. We cleared the land and built the houses to receive our families. We built the houses with lumber provided by the government. I had never done carpentry work before but I took up a hammer for the first time in my life and became a carpenter. Most of those shacks are still standing today.

The Japanese workers in New Denver had a dispute with the supervisors. Construction came to a halt; only construction of the hospital was excluded from the strike. They asked us at Roseberry to join but we declined. We said, 'We are building houses, winter is coming soon and we don't have any time to fool around.' The dispute was over the working conditions and poor pay. They were also unhappy about the way they were treated by the supervisors of the camp. The boss of the commission which dealt with Japanese relocation was a big real estate man and he brought in some of his boys to supervise the camps. That strike went on for about two weeks, there was no clear resolution and they gradually went back to work.

Each camp had troubles among the Japanese themselves. We had a Japanese foreman for each camp. Foremen understood English and they followed the supervisor's advice on managing each camp. In Roseberry the foreman was hated and there was a continuous change of foremen. Some people thought it was better if they didn't follow any advice from the government at all. They even declined to do things which would have been beneficial to themselves, they would not even cooperate to bring in the water system or cut firewood for our own use. I was a foreman in charge of cutting down trees for firewood for a while. But these people insulted me all the times, so I quit. I was a carpenter after that.

Later I got a house and my wife and daughter moved from Kaslo to Roseberry and we lived there for the next four years. They brought pots and kitchenware along. Beds and furniture we made ourselves. The stove was provided by the government. During the first winter it was extremely cold, it froze inside the house sometimes. They were made just from one sheet of lumber with tar paper pasted on the outside. It was really cold. People started to put cedar shingles on the outside and find things for insulation. At the end they were alright.

At the beginning there were many passes required for everyday life; control was quite strict. For example, we were required to get and carry a travel permit to go any place outside our camp at first. Even down the road a few miles to another camp. Later that was loosened up. They got easier because the Japanese were quiet in general.

I did not have much personal contact with white people during those days. They were surprized that we were so quiet. There was no regulation about being friends with white people. At Silverton they were hostile and didn't want any Japanese there, at other places they were alright. There was a farmer near New Denver who was very kind to us. Actually, there were not many white people in the Slocan valley then. It was different from Vancouver. There were more Japanese in the Slocan valley than white people. So they could not be too hostile. Also, merchants in New Denver made money on

Japanese customers. There was only one small trading post at Roseberry and a few stores in New Denver. We didn't have much money but there was still a lot of us to go shopping.

I can't say that we were miserable. Life in those camps was not so bad. Everybody made a garden. We had good crops from our gardens because there were no bugs. It was new land. But we could not get enough fish to eat. People with jobs had to buy food themselves. We only got twenty-five or thirty cents an hour but we got by. People without jobs, old people, were given \$10.50 a month or something like that.

I wasn't bored. We had our clubs in each camp and the meeting of the Slocan Valley association was held in a different place each time. In Slocan, New Denver, Sandon, Lemon Creek and so on. Each camp had a public hall. In Roseberry we built a bigger hall than they had at New Denver, with logs we cut on the mountain. We had performances of stage shows and so on. They were just modern plays; they were the most popular. Then we had amateur shows, singing and acting and so forth. Just local people who liked to perform. Some were talented too. We built several public baths in Roseberry and we took a bath every day. In New Denver there was a huge one. We got used to that kind of life after a while.

My daughter taught school for Japanese children in Kaslo for a while. Later she taught at Lake Mount, near New Denver. When a child grows up they are not that much the same, they change. When my daughter grew up she started to have boyfriends and we began to worry about her. It began when she came here to New Denver. In the beginning there were a lot of young men at the camp, before the government got them to move east. So, a lot of young men and young women were together in the camp. It was a carefree life for them. Young people could entertain themselves. Sure, we use to worry about her association with boyfriends. If it was a possible husband okay. But if it was just somebody to play with I didn't like that.

I was one of those parents always giving criticism. I told my daughter not to go to dances and things like that, 'Don't use make-up. Make-up is not for young

girls,' I said. The first time she used nail polish I was very angry at her and threw the bottle away, I thought it was too sultry. It wasn't even a red polish, it was a natural colour. When our daughter wanted to go to a dance my wife let her go, but I used to wait up for her to come home at two or three in the morning without sleeping. She was very patient. I was a strict father I suppose. At the times I thought I was quite liberal with my daughter. I didn't think I was strict at all.

I knew of the progress of the war by reading newspapers. There were two Japanese papers published in the United States that had articles that came from the bureau of the Japanese army. I don't know how they were allowed to do that. It was obvious what was happening from reading those reports. But most people didn't believe it. I myself at first thought that maybe Japan might be able to make a peace treaty. I hoped that Japan wouldn't be defeated and destroyed. Yes, that's so, even after being opposed to the influence of Japanese militarism. I didn't tell white people that of course. But after the battles of the sea, Midway and such, I knew Japan would be defeated totally. Many people said 'Japan is going to draw her enemies into one spot and defeat them.' What a joke. When they heard about the fall of Okinawa many began to realize.

Before the end of the war the Canadian government started a program of repatriation of Japanese. Naturalized citizens were to choose whether they wanted to go to the east [eastern Canada] or to go back to Japan. At first we were not allowed to stay in B.C.. The B.C. government hoped to get rid of us that way. That man from Vancouver south, Howard Green, who was later Foreign Minister, I think he wanted all Japanese to be sent back to Japan. I and about ten others at Roseberry went around and told people we had to decide how to deal with that. Japan would soon be defeated and the war would be over. I was called a betrayer and a traitor. People threw rocks at our house and insulted us on the street. It is impossible to describe the amount of hate there was toward us. I was the most notorious of that group, the others stayed more in the background. When

the news came that Japan had unconditionally surrendered people were in a complete shock.

The Mounted Police came through the camp taking the names of all the people who said they were ready to be repatriated, The government would pay the fare and give two hundred dollars for expenses to people who were willing to go back. The rest were told to be ready to go to the east. We went around and explained those repatriation papers to people. We tried to convince them not to sign. We said the Japan would be in very hard times and that it would be better if they stayed here. Some people did not believe that, others were so angry with all the discrimination that they wouldn't listen to anything. Despite our efforts I think most of the Issei signed those repatriation papers at first. The Nisei, not very many signed. People hated us very much for a while. They called us dogs and almost beat me up. But I was so unpopular for too long.

After the war ended there was a big turmoil. People began to think more clearly and there were many people who wanted to cancel their signatures for repatriation. We hired two influential white lawyers and started a cancel movement. Each person who signed for repatriation had to write a separate appeal to cancel. At New Denver and Roseberry over a half of those who signed for repatriation finally cancelled. In the meantime, younger people, most of the Nisei, were sent to the east. The young men went first, even before the end of the war. My daughter left for Toronto about a year later. All her friends went east so she followed them. She used to write to us but we used to worry about her a lot.

What do I think life would have been like without the war? Well, I think we would have lived more or less the same kind of life. I never thought very much about what I would do in the future. Even if I thought about it there wasn't much I could do about it. If we hadn't been interned we probably could have lived a little more comfortably. But I never was able to save very much money anyway. I don't think the war effected our life that way too much. Because war or no war we had to work to eat. One thing. Because of the internment all of

our old friends are scattered. They are not here any more. Some went back to Japan, many others went east, others are scattered around B.C. But discrimination against us began to disappear shortly after the war.

### **Fresh Starts and Familiar Places**

In August 1946 we moved to the east. We first lived in an old prisoner of war camp in northern Ontario; it was a temporary accommodation for the Japanese going east. People from Slocan and Lemon Creek and New Denver and other places were all there for the time being. There were about a hundred people in that camp and some were coming in while others were going out every day. When they found jobs and housing people left for other destinations. We stayed there about a month. The government found jobs on farms and factories for a lot of people but I found a job in a place I wanted to go myself. A friend of mine was working in Hamilton. I thought I would be able to find a job if I went there.

I got a job in Hamilton at the gas company, It was built by the government during the war to make gas from coal. There already were thirty or so Japanese working at that company, maybe five hundred living in Hamilton. It was a year after the war and Japanese were allowed to buy a house and move around, drink and so forth. We rented the upstairs of a house owned by other Japanese people. I didn't have very much chance to drink all the time we lived in Roseberry camp and I had lost a lot of weight. I was quite healthy. Now I started to take a little drink each day, not so much though.

Our daughter was living in Toronto and working in a big cleaning shop. We were worried about her but when we came east we found that young men and young women were living happily by themselves. They didn't have any restrictions from their parents. When they lived in Vancouver the parents had a lot to say to their children, even when they were grown. In the east they were free and happier.

She was twenty-four and I wanted her to get married. But she didn't get married until she was twenty-nine. We didn't know what to do about her. The kind of husband I wanted for her? Well, first of all I wanted him to be sincere. Then, one who could provide a satisfactory life economically. An ordinary person who is different from me. I wanted my daughter to have an easy life. But a man who is good at making a lot of money usually has some kind of bad fault. I wanted her husband to have at least graduated from high school. Some of the men she associated with seemed alright to me but my daughter didn't like them. So that's the way it is. There's nothing to do about it.

I worked at the gas company in Hamilton looking after loading coke. Coke is left over from coal after extracting the gas, the gas comes off by steaming coal. That is sent off to be used elsewhere. The coke fell automatically from a big machine into rail cars. I watched till the cars were full up to the top and then I stopped the loader and sent the car out. That's what I did. Everything was automatic.

After a year there was a long lay-off at the gas company. They stopped work and I went to work at a company making roofing paper. The job there was something even women could do so I didn't like it at all. Also the wages were not very good. I was there only a few months and tried to find another job. There was a big steel mill in Hamilton which started to employ Japanese people after the war. I went for a job application; they didn't hire anybody over fifty and I was fifty nine. I asked some of the people I worked with at the roofing company how old they thought I was. They said, 'You're about forty-five or forty-six'? So I went back to the steel mill and told them I was forty-nine. Just the deadline, but they said okay. I had to belong to an insurance program and after a while I got a note telling me to report to the insurance doctor. I thought I was in trouble. It was a very strict examination but the doctor believed I was forty-nine. So on all those forms I was forty-nine years old again.

I worked in the steel mill for fully five years. At the beginning I had a very miserable job but gradually my

job improved. There were about six thousand people working in that steel plant when I was there. I never worked in such a mill before. There again I was working with coke. Coke is indispensable to produce steel. It is mixed with the ore and burned to separate the iron. Coke burns well without producing smoke but some coke is not suitable for iron making. Different kinds of coke were moved to different places in the mill on huge belts and I operated the switches for those belts. I received signals and sent some of the coke to the fireplaces, some to the reserve tanks, some to be shipped out,

Switchman was pretty well paid, a dollar fifty and hour then. I had that switchman's job because younger people did not like the dirt. I was able to understand English quite well then and I was thinking of taking a night school course from the company to become a skilled technician in the plant. But I was too old. I became ill. My job was very dusty and coke dust is very bad for you. Workers were supposed to wear masks but it was hard to breathe with the mask on so I didn't put it on. The air pollution was terrible and at the end I found it difficult to breathe at all. That is why I was so much weakened. Finally I quit the steel mill.

After 1951 Japanese were allowed to fish in B.C. again. In 1951 and 1952 the B.C. Packers people came east to recruit experienced Japanese fishermen. I was sixty-five years old and I had already quit the steel mill. I was thinking about getting another job but when I talked to the cannery people I decided to come back to fish on the Skeena. We went back to live on the Skeena in 1952, That time my wife and I had a house right by the Sunnyside cannery. We didn't live in Vancouver after that,

Japanese [Canadians] were first allow to vote in Ontario in 1946. I voted for the first time in my life in Hamilton. When I voted I felt I could finally join the human race. I worked for the C.C.F. campaign in Hamilton, I was on a truck and went around to the Japanese people telling them to vote for the C.C.F. and we won. It was very satisfying.

Japanese were allowed to vote also in B.C. by the times we came back and I worked in the provincial and

federal campaigns for the C.C.F. during the time we lived on the Skeena. I went to talk to all the people working in the cannery. All the time I lived there, Skeena went to the C.C.F.. Now Skeena has a representative from the canneries, I heard. I still vote for the N.D.P. but I don't campaign anymore. There are some Nisei who would never vote for them. They vote Social Credit just because they think they are going to win. Those people are just hollow bamboo.

I fished for Sunnyside cannery for nine years. B.C. Packers used to have a lot of canneries on the Skeena but slowly they were all merged into the cannery at Sunnyside. If we had been using the old way of fishing I could not have done it for long, just a few years more. Putting in the net and pulling it up again was the hardest work in gillnetting. The net is about a thousand feet long and pulling it up was hard work. But when I went back to the Skeena that work was done by the engine - separating the float side from the lead side and using the power drum on the back of the boat to pull in the net. That was why I could do fishing although I was over sixty-five.

There were now about a hundred boats fishing out of Sunnyside. Many fishermen were buying their own boats. I was advised to buy my own boat but since I was sixty-five I didn't know how much longer I would be able to fish. So I used a cannery boat. Rent was five hundred or six hundred dollars a season usually. The bookkeeper had promised me a good boat but when I got there there was no boat available for me. Just two days before the Sockeye season started they gave me an very old boat with a bad engine. So I started back fishing, After some years there were only about ten people still fishing with cannery boats. The cannery owned the boat but the rest of the gear belonged to me. I bought my own net and put in the cork and lead line myself for not much more than the rental cost. My wife took up mending and she fixed the small holes in the net herself. If you hired somebody to do that during the season it was very expensive and they didn't do a particularly good job.

Gradually more Japanese fishermen came back. There were no restrictions against us. We could fish offshore.

You could catch shrimp or crab in the winter if you wanted, then go after Springs by either trolling or gillnetting. When the Sockeye season came in you could fish on the Skeena or the Nass and after that go after the Coho on the way back to Vancouver. The big change was that most Japanese fishermen now had their own fish boats and came up from Steveston and Vancouver to fish. There were no real fishing camps of the old Skeena fishermen anymore.

When the Japanese fishermen came back the Indians didn't like it at all. They caused a lot of trouble. For example, they interfered with us putting our nets in the sea. If I put my net down they put theirs in front of it. There were some threats against Japanese fishermen but it didn't last long. We went to fish offshore to avoid disturbances. The Indians fished in the river and at its mouth mainly. Only at the end of the season . when we fished Pinks, we had to fish in the same places as the Indian fishermen. But after a while they gave up making difficulties for us. They had better boats and better gear than before the war, they worked harder and caught more fish. There are now more Indian fishermen on the Skeena than anyone else.

Some Japanese people said we should have our own group in the Fishermen's Union [U.F.A.W.U.]. I was against that. I said that before, when Japanese couldn't belong to the white fishermen's unions, we had to make a Japanese group. But now we are members of the whole union and if we organize a Japanese group it's just making division. If anybody can't speak English there are a lot of second generation people who can interpret at meetings. It is not necessary to express ourselves as a separate group, we can say whatever we want to say as fishermen. That's what the majority of the Japanese fishermen felt too. If the union is not strong the canneries will never raise the price they pay fishermen.

I used to fish alone, without a partner. I used to be a good fisherman before but when I went back to the Skeena I wasn't so good anymore. I was too old. Once I was on a good fishing spot and fishermen around me put their nets down and caught a lot of fish, but I didn't. It was at night and I found it hard to fish at night. I

didn't have any trouble in the day time but I lost my sense of direction at night. I couldn't tell how close I was to the beach and to shoals. The tide is very fast in the beach area and the net can get caught by rocks and logs and things. You have to be able to sense that. I couldn't tell how close I was to shore at night anymore. I've heard that many people, when they get older, have that experience. You lose some kind of sense. My body wasn't as strong as before either.

Once you know how to fish and where and when to fish the amount of fish you get depends a lot on how much you work. When the fish are running you might only get three or four hours sleep. You try to fish as long as you can while they're running. When you see the cork start to move you know they are coming into the net. If you are sleeping you can miss your chance to get a big catch. So good fishermen are working with the net all the time. When I was young I often didn't sleep for three days. I couldn't do that anymore because I needed a lot of sleep.

I almost drowned once. I was working near the Standard camp at the mouth of the Skeena river. The tide runs very fast in August and makes a kind of whirlpool there. I was tied up to a buoy but I wanted to anchor further out. The anchor was already running and somehow I got my feet caught in the line and I was thrown into the sea. When I came up the boat was five or six feet away, swinging around. I tried to get out of my rubber boots but I couldn't get them off. So I swam with those rubber boots on - it was hard ! I got to the boat but I could not reach up to the deck. There was a rope hanging down into the water from the bow and I swam to that. The water was so cold and I was so tired that I couldn't pull myself up on that rope.

I hoped for another fishing boat to come by and rescue me. After fifteen or twenty minutes in the water I saw a boat coming. I shouted but they could not hear me over their engine. The boat was already passed when the wife of that fisherman saw me waving in the water. They came and pulled me out. I was exhausted. If that boat did not come along then I think I might have died there.

From 1952 till 1959 we lived on the Skeena all year round. I and my wife lived at Sunnyside in a cannery cabin standing on the wharf. There were six cabins for Japanese and up to fifty cabins for Indian people. Most Indian and cannery workers lived there only in the fishing season. There were some big houses near the beach for the managers and the engineer. Japanese fishermen were then living in Steveston and took their boats up to the Skeena during the fishing season. There were no fishing camps as we used to know them. Men slept on their own boats. Some of them ate in the bunkhouse, some of them cooked for themselves. They didn't stay so long anyway.

From the end of September to the middle of June was off-season. In March, April, May those three months, I worked in the cannery doing net repairs for wages. In the winter times I didn't have anything to do. I did a little trolling from a rowboat, just sport fishing. I caught Spring salmon and I used to give the fish away. It was really a lot of fun. Thus we lived and saved up money to retire on.

My wife didn't like living on the Skeena. She didn't like that life within a small Japanese community. All the interference into each other's personal life. It didn't bother me but it seemed that that close-knit community life bothered my wife very much. So we finally decided to move.

For the last two years that I was fishing I commuted to the Skeena for the fishing season with my wife. The rest of the year we lived in New Denver. We bought an old house here and fixed it up. I was still strong enough to fish. I was still in good health until a couple of years ago. The thing was that my legs were not so steady. The seaweed from the net falls on the deck and I would slip. I slipped and fell all the time. When I was seventy-three I had a bad fall in the cannery and I got the idea that I would not live much longer. I even had my picture taken with that in mind. That is many years ago now. I fished one more year and then I quit.

Why did we move back to New Denver? Well, my daughter was married and living in Nakusp. She met her husband back when we lived in Roseberry camp. She

must have been seeing him all those years and we didn't know anything about it. We weren't here when she was married; my friends in Revelstoke attended the wedding for us. Well. I guess she must have loved him.

My wife and I were going to retire in Nakusp but then we realized that living there could create problems. I might get into arguments with my daughter's in-laws. We thought it would be better not to live too close. Thirty miles is not too far for visits. So we decided to buy a house in New Denver. There were lots of empty houses here in 1959. There was a good house I was going to buy but the lady who owned it had moved to Japan and died. The arrangements were complicated so I decided to buy the house we are in today. I bought it for three hundred dollars. It was just a shabby shack then, very run down. The house was left abandoned since the war and it was very cold in the winter. The wind blew through all over the place. But I fixed it up, I fixed everything up the year after I retired from fishing in 1961. It's small but it's fairly nice now, as you see. It gives us shelter. This is the first time I ever owned my own house.

If our daughter hadn't been living in Nakusp I wouldn't have come here. My wife likes New Denver alright but I can't do anything here. I would have moved to Prince Rupert; I like Prince Rupert. I like to be by the sea. I could have fished three or four weeks during the Sockeye season. I would have done sport fishing for another ten years or more. That would have been a good life. Maybe that is what I should have done.

I have never been back to Japan. My wife went back for a visit but I never did. When I was younger I wanted to go for a visit but I never had the money. My family sent me money to come back after I had been in Canada for six or seven years but I didn't want to go back then. Later I wanted to go for a visit but I didn't have the money. Now I have a little but I can't walk so well anymore. It is too much trouble to go now. All my family is dead, everybody I knew there is dead now. Only one of my step-sister's daughter is still living. She was only three years old when I left.

Our daughter and her husband moved to Vancouver after a while. Her husband is still working in a sawmill there. They are far away again. She had a miscarriage with one child but, at the time, I had one grandson living. Our grandson died two years ago. He was only twenty years old. The cause is not known. Our daughter was very shocked. She was lost for a while. We think she has recovered but she is a very nervous person now. She goes to the horse races and there she spends all the money that she earns.

It is impossible for us to move to Vancouver. My daughter said that their basement suite is always ready for us to move in. But we don't want to live with another family. You cannot buy a house in Vancouver for even ten thousand dollars today. You cannot buy a house on payments when you are old. You have to pay cash. So we stay here. I like New Denver better than Vancouver anyway. I don't like the cold here but Vancouver is too noisy. There is no hustle here.

### **Reflections (April 1975)**

Nowadays some people talk about Canada as a country where different cultures can exist but before the war it was not like that. People felt that Canadian culture was English culture and all other customs were excluded, not liked. Today some of the more progressive politicians talk about the co-existence of different cultures in Canada and about taking the good parts from each. But I don't think that the general public is very much for that.

Well, I don't think that the Issei from my time could become purely Canadian. As for myself, I'm more Canadian than I was. But even now, the culture that I am most attached to is that of Japan. I have been living here such a long time and I still feel this way. I lived in Japan my first twenty-three years but I have been living in Canada for over sixty years. And still those twenty-three years are stronger. It is strange. Where you were born

and raised has a great influence on a person. Maybe it is nostalgic feelings.

The future of the Japanese in Canada? Well, the young people, those born here, are already Canadian in the way they think. That is not necessarily a bad thing for them. And there is so much marrying with white people today. As is said, 'When the river enters the sea the muddy water mixes with the seas and is gone'.

Speaking for myself, I don't think I ever accomplished anything very useful. For example, I was a member of the Labour Union and did a lot of work for it. But it wasn't very successful. All the things we did to free ourselves from discrimination, also without success. It only changed after the war. We didn't stop that. So I don't know what we had been doing.

We didn't improve the working conditions of Japanese workers either, really. I feel that all the things we did were useless. The things we did brought no benefit. Maybe I would have felt the same way whatever I did. Of course, when I was doing those things I always felt that my work was going to do some good eventually. But it makes me feel empty now. I feel I might have compromised too much. My life has been sort of trivial. I feel sorry for the readers. Maybe the fact that this sort of person existed could be interesting now. But, for myself, I don't think I had a particularly unusual life.

## Some Historical Background

The following is a schematic outline of select aspects of Japanese-Canadian history, with some brief comments on the initial conditions in Japan prior to emigration. It is intended as a context for Ryuichi Yoshida's personal account. Geared for the lay reader it provides little novel material for either a specialist in B.C. labour history or in Japanese-Canadian history.

### **Japanese currents (1895-1912)**

Japan did not leave the feudal era until the overthrow of the Tokogawa regime in 1868 by what became known as the Meiji Restoration. The recency of this event may be brought home by the fact the Ryuichi Yoshida's grandfather, a central figure of Yoshida's childhood, lived most of his active adult life in what was a classic feudal society.

The Meiji period (1868-1912) oversaw a forced draft modernization and industrialization of Japan under an autocratic but, during its initial twenty-five years, a broadly liberating regime. Within forty years Japan was changed from a weak, anachronistic and totally isolated country facing colonial encroachment into one the the half dozen industrial and military powers of the time. The driving force was a nationalism which by 1895 had grown into a nascent imperialism of its own.

The remarkable nature of this metamorphosis may be appreciated in the realizing that by the end of the Meiji period Japan was the single major non-EuroAmerican country which had not been brought under some form

of colonial domination. Japanese and others of that period saw it as the first case and the possible precursor of other non-western nations rising to importance. This fact helps to illuminate the intense pride and support with Japanese, even the exploited sectors, widely gave to the Meiji and later regimes.

And exploitation there certainly was. The Meiji period witnessed not merely modernization and industrialization but the creation of a highly concentrated form of monopoly capitalism. This was intermixed with many social carry-overs from the former feudal society. The not inconsiderable civil rights of a developed bourgeois democracy made only partial and much contested advances. More significantly, the capitalist industrialization of the country was built on great hardships for many sectors of the Japanese population, especially small farmers. This was so despite some indisputable general improvements in life: The legal elimination of former cast restrictions, the spread of modern medicine, the rapid increase in literacy through a system of universal grade schools and so forth.

The relentless process of capital accumulation, along with the broad social changes occurring throughout the country, prepared the ground for some unplanned (although not surprising) responses. Despite the strong and conservative cultural continuities, increasing numbers of Japanese were attempting novel solutions to their problems by the late 1890s. These became ever more apparent. While this may seem like ancient history it was within the living memory of Yoshida and many of his fellow Issei.

Between 1877 and 1900 the population of Japan increased from about 35 to 44.8 million people. Industrialization and the laying of a modern state and military infrastructure relied heavily upon increased taxes and rents from farmers and peasants. Customary rights were eroded, traditional industries undercut. There was a steadily rising rural population with a static land base. There was also a quiet process of rising expectations, or at least hopes.

Among the peasantry and the farmer-fishermen, who in 1900 still made up some 80 percent of the Japanese population, debates about socialism, labour unions, women's rights and so forth seem to have had little currency. There was resistance to many of the consequences of industrialization.

Such responses were largely couched in terms of social conservatism. It was a conservatism however which did not prevent people from attempting new techniques, learning about the modern world or being ready to try new jobs in distant places (be they in Tokyo or Vancouver). Two decades later many of these same peasant areas would see an upsurge of tenants disputes, rent strikes, land seizures, mass organization under farmer-labour parties. However, that is not part of this story. What is the trajectory of those village emigrants who became industrial and other workers in Canada. Some of them formed the membership of the Camp and Mill Worker's Union and provided the readership of *The Daily People*.

The world of rural Japan during the late Meiji period was the origin of probably the majority of the Issei who came to Canada before World War One. They were the 'first generation' whose stories and views have entered ethnic histories. There was however a rather different stream of Japanese immigrants who came with somewhat different ideas.

By the late 1890s a massive rural migration was under way to what were becoming the major metropolises of Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya and dozens of smaller but rapidly growing industrial cities. By the turn of the century the number of urban wage workers was growing very rapidly in Japan. The majority of even urban wage workers were employed in the plethora of family-sized enterprises employing an average of only five workers per establishment. More or less traditional master-servant relations existed in many of such establishments. However by 1897 there were already 440,000 real factory workers in Japan, a figure which had doubled by 1914 and quadrupled by the end of World War One. Already by the end of the Meiji era some 45 percent of

these factory workers were in establishments of more than 100 employees (Totten:1966:21, 30).

While craft guilds and benevolent societies existed from Tokugawa times and throughout the Meiji period the first true labour unions were begun by the *Shokko Giyukai* (Friends of Labour). Established in Tokyo in 1897 it set out to organize labour unions among the growing industrial working class during a decade which witnessed some of the worst excesses of early Japanese capitalism. A number of those who founded the *Shokko Giyukai* had been resident in San Francisco during the early 1890s, where they constituted a group that studied the policies and techniques of American labour unions. According to one historian they were initially influenced by the practices of the Knights of Labor. (Totten, 1966:21)

In December of 1897 the *Shokko Giyukai*, renamed the 'Association for the formation of Labour Unions', succeeded in organizing the first industrial union in Japan, the Iron Workers Union. By 1900 it had some 5,400 members - mainly metal workers and machinists at factories in the Tokyo-Yokohama area. Sen Katayama, who had recently returned from eleven years in the United States where he became a very moderate socialist, was elected secretary of the new union and launched a newspaper called *Rodo Sekai* (Labour World). This was the first labour paper in Japan. Reorganized in 1903 as the *Heimin* (Commoner), it became a socialist general circulation weekly which also published books, including Naoe Kinoshita's famous anti-militarist *Pillar of Fire* (1905).

An overlapping group established the Society for the Study of Socialism, which developed into the Social-Democratic party (*Shakai Minshu-to*) in 1901. One of the founding elements of the Social-Democratic party was the Nippon Railway Workers Union, which in 1901 formally proclaimed its belief that 'socialism is the only ultimate solution of the labor problem' (Kublin, 1964:143) The first railway had opened some twenty years earlier. During its first years this party attracted much of the early Japanese left, before that movement began to split along more distinct lines.

The Social-Democratic Party (and its successor, the Japan Socialist Party) acted as the voice of labour mainly in the political arena, It soon became evident that they were quite impotent there. Concurrent with its founding a Police and Public Order law was passed outlawing strikes and labour unions in general (although they were allowed a quasi-legal existence at governmental pleasure). The much contested first Factory Acts were repeatedly defeated and proved of minimal protection against horrendous working conditions when they finally emerged in 1911. A decade after foundation of the Iron Workers Union only a miniscule fraction of even the industrial working class was organized.

Government attitudes toward labour organizations and socialist grouping hardened in the year preceding the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905). Even mildly reformist programs which had once had a certain aura of experimental novelty fell under suspicion. For instance, agitation to obtain suffrage and adult legal status for women was considered particularly insidious and stern measures were taken against it. The struggles to obtain and defend many 'basic' civil rights drew significant numbers of the middle class into sporadic contest with the government, some ultimately into the socialist movement.

During 1903 to 1905 a nascent anti-war and anti-militarist movement developed in Japan but faltered under government arrests and the rising tide of patriotism which the Japanese victories in the Russo-Japanese war brought. The anti-militarist sentiment however was never fully eliminated.

The full thrust of Meiji reaction developed after that war in what became widely known as the 'Red flag incident' (1908) It was symbolic of the wider repression which had emerged. This repression culminated in 1911 when Shusui Kotoku, his wife and ten other anarcho-syndicalists were secretly tried and executed on trumped up charges of conspiring to kill the Emperor. Nationwide arrests of socialist and labour leaders, the banning of opposition newspapers and political rallies threw the

left into disarray, Labour organizations did not develop again until the end of World War One.

Neither the socialist nor the labour movement in Japan sprang from any single source. One of the most striking aspects of the intellectual milieu during the late Meiji period was the tremendous heterogeneity of programs being debated. Marxian socialism, pure labour unionism, varieties of anarcho-syndicalism, state socialism, Tolstoy's peasant communes as well as 'modernism' in all its disparate hues. All these were being advanced by various progressive groupings as well as programmes by a host of nineteenth century proponents whose positions are totally forgotten today. All contending for support under the broad banner of 'socialism'. Intermixed in all this were imported and indigenous political philosophies whose programs were essentially attempts to refurbish the regime ancien.

While of comparatively limited circulation nationally these cross currents did involve a significant number of politicized urban workers, university students and members of senescent or emergent new classes, who were becoming part of the mainstream of world events. Ryuichi Yoshida and others like him were part of that world before they emigrated to North America.

### **American eddies (1900-1915)**

Interest in socialism and labour unionism began among members of the Japanese community in North America earlier than is generally recognized. By 1900 some Japanese in the west coast cities of the U.S. were involved in socialist study groups. When Sen Katayama made one of his many tours to the U.S. in 1903 he was able - in Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, Milwaukee and in other cities - to draw audiences to lectures on socialism and the labour movement. In the same year a Japanese Socialist Party was formed in Seattle which two years later began to organize Japanese workers in sawmills, canneries and in railroad construction throughout Washington State under the banner of the Japanese Labour Association. They launched a monthly magazine called *Doho'* (Brotherhood) which exposed

exploitation of Japanese workers by Japanese and other labour contractors. The Japanese Labour Association still existed thirteen years later when it contributed funds to the Seattle General Strike in 1919.(Yoneda,1975:14)

In 1904 Shusui Kotoku, Yae Nishiwaza (a leader of the women's rights movement in Japan) and a number of their followers made a lecture tour of the Pacific coast communities. Kotoku addressed meetings there under somewhat ironic conditions. Speaking in the Seattle Japanese hall in 1904 to an audience of 500 he said, 'The photographs of the Emperor and Empress are hung in front of this hall. And on both sides those of Togo and Nogi [two military leaders in the Russo-Japanese war] and dozens of other decorated heroes are aligned....What a queer contrast that I, and ex-convict convicted of high treason, am to stand on this platform and give a speech against war and in favor of socialism' (Ito,1974: 731)

In 1906 some fifty Japanese workers and students in the San Francisco Bay area were members of a Social Democratic Party and for a while put out a journal called 'Revolution'. About this time there also was a Japanese Day Laborers Union in the Bay area (Yoneda. 1975:10) By 1914 there were three Japanese labour associations in the San Francisco area alone; the Japanese Day Laborers Union, The Oakland Japanese Laundry Employees Union and the Japanese Labour Association. These three organizations were amalgamated in 1915 but apparently purged some of their leftwing leadership. Sen Katayama during his brief stay in San Francisco also founded a socialist journal called *Heimin*, after its Tokyo forerunner. (Yoneda, 1975:10)

In addition to those Issei influenced by developments in Japan, socialism was also a topic of the day in America. By 1910 socialist parties, study groups, and an extensive English and foreign language press spread virtually throughout North America. Sen Katayama and other Japanese socialists were already known there for their articles in the '*International Socialist Review*'. in '*Die Neue Zeit*'; and the '*New York Call*' as well as in a host of similar journals, although these probably had more effect on non-Japanese readers than on most Issei immigrants.

The '*Western Clarion*', a socialist weekly published in Vancouver, included articles on the labour movement in Japan and among oriental workers in Canada as well as occasionally reporting on lecture tours by Japanese socialists in America. It took a consistent stand against anti-orientalism. Such views of course were in a small minority both among whites and orientals.

### **On B.C. shores (1893-1919)**

There was one known Japanese resident in B.C. in 1877, a few hundred on the Fraser in the 1890s and about 2,000 in 1898. The major period of Japanese immigration to British Columbia began in the late 1890s and by 1901 the Japanese population of the province had risen to some 4,600 (Adachi, 1976:413). A substantial proportion of them came from fishing villages in southern Japan and already by 1900 they were concentrated in the Fraser river fisheries. Fishing remained a primary occupation for these emigrants after 1900, when a certain diversification of employment developed.

Fish canneries in B.C. initially utilized a mainly native Indian labour force, with an increasing number of white fishermen entering the Fraser river fisheries by the late 1880s. By that time Chinese labour gangs were important in the fish butchering and can making operations in most canneries. From its inception until the late 1940s the fish canning industry in B.C. was based on racially segregated groups of workers. Here, more than in any other industry, workers were enmeshed in inter-racial rivalry. What is less well known are the recurrent examples of shifting cooperation between various groups or the long (if usually unsuccessful ) attempts by a few to mobilize workers in the fishing industry along class not racial lines.

Two of the first 'strikes' in the fishing industry were carried out by Chinese cannery workers on the Fraser river canneries in 1881 and again in 1889. Unorganized and in a hostile environment, these two stoppages quickly fizzled out. The year 1893 saw the first organized attempt to gain better prices from the canners by the white Fraser River Fishermen's Protective and

Benevolent Association and their Indian allies. There were then already a significant number of Japanese fishermen on the Fraser. Although some Japanese supported the F.R.F.P.A.'s boycott that organization's exclusionist attitude allowed the canneries to mobilize Japanese fishermen as strike breakers.

"Of particular interest in this (1893) strike was the position of the Japanese which illustrated the weakness of the labour movement's anti-oriental stance. The Japanese fishermen were asked by the Association to support the strike. They asked to join the Association but were turned down. They offered \$500 to the Association to help them set up a separate Japanese union, but this too was rejected.

In any case, the fishermen remained divided on racial lines for many decades. This impeded the establishment of any permanent organization." (Phillips, 1967:23)

By 1900 Japanese fishermen were working more than 1,950 of the 4,722 fishing licenses issued for the Fraser. The Fraser river fishermen's strike of that year was much longer, more widespread and more bitter than that of 1893. In prelude two socialist leaders of the Fishermen's Protective and Benevolent Association attempted to create a coordinated organization of all fishermen on the river but were blocked by that Association's New Westminster branch. The Japanese fishermen in the Steveston area responded by establishing their own organization, the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society (*Dantai*'), representing about 1,200 fishermen from 12 canneries.

A demand of twenty-five cents per fish and guaranteed purchase of catch at the cannery docks was made in June and separately agreed to by all three groups -white, Indian and Japanese fishermen. The strike remained effective until July 24 when blandishments and threats by the canners, the influence of Japanese fishing bosses and exacerbated distrust and rivalry between ethnic groups influenced the bulk of the Japanese fishermen to return to work. The arrival of 200

militia men to protect the strike breakers helped. The bulk of the 700 white fishermen, all of the Indian fishermen and few Japanese held out some time longer and then drifted back to fish.

A shorter but more intricate and violent strike occurred on the river the following year, with approximately the same results. The white and Indian fishermen progressively turned their efforts to expel the Japanese from the industry rather than building an effective supra-ethnic union.

On the Skeena, canneries were also operated initially by native Indian fishermen and cannery workers. Japanese fishermen did not arrive in number until the end of the 1890s. One large but short-lived strike on Rivers Inlet in 1899 involved some 2,500 fishermen and cannery workers. That same year a strike by some 800 fishermen on the Skeena lasted most of the season. Native Indians were the active participants in both these disputes. Whites and Japanese were reported satisfied with the prices offered by the canners but refrained from fishing until the Indians had returned. (Jamieson,1971:141)

The 1904 strike on the Skeena proceeded somewhat differently. The *Vancouver Province* of July 2, 1904 reported from Port Essington that,

The canners believe they can turn the Japanese against the Indians and so win them over. They are now busily working on the feelings of of the Japanese by reminding them of the fact that in the strike of 1899 the Indians went back on the Japanese, left them in the lurch, and caused them to lose a week's fishing. The Japs remember the treatment they received from the Indians at the time and many of them are inclined to stand by the canners and fish this season.

The canners were successful in their attempts.

By 1910 the sixteen canneries on the Skeena and Nass held 1,090 fishing licenses among themselves, contracting out approximately half of these to Japanese and half to Indian fishermen. Most in both groups worked under the 'attach' system mentioned by Yoshida. With two men per boat there were somewhat more than

2,200 fishermen so engaged, in addition to a number of independent white and Indian fishermen also operating in that area. (Ross;1967: 96)

By 1913 the Japanese were numerically the largest group fishing on the Fraser. The respective roles of the three racial groups- Japanese, whites and Indians - had become almost the exact reverse of the previous decades. In the 1913 strike of fishermen and allied workers, Japanese and Indian women cannery workers initially walked off the job together.

The Japanese were reported 'completely organized, with union hall and officers.' The whites 'being all nationalities besides English-speaking' lacked organization, as did the Indians. Fishermen of both the latter groups were reported to favour a compromise with the canners but the organized Japanese, who had called the strike, kept them in line for two days.....There were several reports of the use of violence, intimidation, and property damage by Japanese unionists against white and Indian strikebreakers, reminiscent of the tactics employed by whites and Indians against the Japanese strikebreakers in 1900 and 1901. (Jamieson,1971: 142-143)

The build-up to the Russo-Japanese war witnessed a curtailment of Japanese emigration between 1902 and 1905 while extensive immigration occurred between late 1905 and the end of 1908, during which time some 12,400 Japanese entered Canada. However a great many also left since three years later, in 1911, there were only 9,021 Japanese resident in B.C. (Adachi, 1976:412-413)

A deepening depression in 1906-1907, a long history of anti-oriental sentiment and the arrival of a ship carrying more than 1,100 Japanese immigrants led to the 1907 anti-oriental riots in Vancouver, where a mob attacked and ransacked parts of the Japanese and Chinese districts. A quasi-political Anti-Asiatic League used this event to sway local and provincial politicians and a tussle began between the interests of the Federal authorities and their provincial counterparts. The result was a 'Gentlemen's Agreement' between Japan and

Canada which saw the Japanese government limit emigration to Canada to a maximum of 400 persons per year. The last mass migration of Japanese to B.C. (from Hawaii) occurred in 1908. This was the result of a long drawn-out boycott by Japanese workers of conditions on Hawaiian sugar plantations, on which they were the major work force.

Japanese miners and labourers worked in the coal mines near Nanaimo and Cumberland by the mid 1890s. There were about 500 Japanese coal miners in the province by 1902, mainly in the Vancouver Island coal fields. (McLoughlin,1951:98) Both Japanese and Chinese mineworkers received substantially lower wage rates than whites doing equivalent jobs and were used to undercut union organization and to defuse strikes in the mining area. This history produced one of the persistent sources of working class anti-orientalism.

Despite the existing anti-orientalism among many B.C. miners the Western Federation of Miners raised the demand that wage differentials between white and oriental mine workers be eliminated. According to Bennett a total of 500 Chinese and Japanese and 300 white workers struck together in the 1903 organizational campaign of the Western Federation of Miners. (Bennett,1935:118) Their efforts were broken by the coal owners and their government.

By 1912 the great concentration of Japanese miners was in the company coal town of Cumberland, where 160 Japanese and a large number of Chinese workers resided. During the initial phase of the Great Coal Strike(1912-1914) most of the oriental workers stayed off the job. But under threat of eviction and even deportation they were forced to accept the company's ultimatum.( Phillips,1967:57)

A series of legislative acts effectively excluded orientals from underground work in the mines after 1924 and by 1930 the only sizeable number of Japanese mine workers were the 150 to 200 men working in the surface operations of Britannia Beach mine.

The few hundred Japanese labourers working on railway construction and maintenance shortly after 1900 rose to a peak of 1,300 in 1907. They were all

hired and paid through two major Japanese labour contracting firms - the *Nikka Yotatsu Kaisha* company with headquarters in Vancouver and the *Furuya* company with head offices in Seattle. The *Yotatsu Kaisha* company held contracts to supply Japanese workers for the C.P.R, maintenance gangs while the *Furuya* company managed to pick up various construction contracts.

W.J. Bowser, the gray eminence of the B.C. Tories and the coming Attorney-General of the McBride provincial government, was actively engaged as the solicitor and agent of the *Furuya* company in importing Japanese railway workers at about the same time as he was casting his political net in the waters of anti-orientalism. (Robin, 1972:101) A Public Works Act passed during the McBride regime excluded Japanese and other oriental labourers on projects involving government funds. This included all railways in the province other than the C.P.R., which continued to contract 600 Japanese workers throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The lumber industry employed Japanese workers as permanent and seasonal hands in the sawmills of the greater Vancouver area beginning before 1900. In 1901 they comprised about twenty-two percent of the approximately 1,000 employees of the seven larger mills in the area- Hastings, Moodyville, Barnett, Royal City, Heaps, MacNair and Spicer sawmills. (McLoughlin,1951.Appendix 2). Some ten years later Hastings sawmill and the Canadian Western Lumber mill at Fraser Mills employed over 200 Japanese workers each (Sumida,1935: 337,339). Oriental labour was typically paid a lower scale than white labour, a common differential being one-quarter to one third less for the same job.

By 1910 Japanese loggers, as well as shingle and sawmill workers, had spread throughout the lower mainland, Vancouver Island and the southern coast. They may have comprised as much as 15 percent of the work force in that industry. The Crown Timber Act passed in 1913 attempted to exclude oriental workers from employment in operations utilizing crown timber lands (the great majority of the smaller and mid-sized operations). After numerous legislative revisions and

court cases and the Act being declared *ultra vires* by Federal courts the exclusion of orientals from crown timber was largely effected through administrative and ministerial discretionary powers. The effect was not so much to eliminate the Japanese employed in the industry as to force them into employment by the largest lumber and sawmill corporations, which owned great tracts of timber not subject to provincial edicts.

Japanese workers remained particularly important in the operations of the Victoria Door and Lumber Company in the Cowichan-Chemainus area, the Canadian Western Lumber Company logging operations around Comox, in logging and mill work for Powell River Company and at Ocean Falls, Swanson Bay and Woodfibre. In addition, Japanese sawmill workers were numerous around Englewood, Port Alberni, Victoria and in some interior BC locations. By 1917 some 700 Japanese workers were employed in Greater Vancouver sawmills. (Yamashita, 1942:28)

The total number of Japanese lumber and sawmill workers increased in the 1920s. They comprised 1,550 of the approximately 11,000 woods workers in B.C. during 1918 whereas in 1929 there were 2,770 Japanese woods workers out of a total of some 32,000 (Sumida, 1935: Table 75: 369-370) These figures include the 368 Japanese workers employed in 1929 by the 14 Japanese-owned lumber and shingle mills, the largest of which was the Kagetsu Fanny Bay operation.

### **Mid-Passage ( 1919-1939)**

The period 1917 to 1921 witnessed a peak of militancy in B.C. labour which had developed over the previous fifteen years. This militancy was directed not only at bread and butter issues but was in contest with much of the then capitalist system. An aspect of this contest was a heightened appreciation of class as opposed to supposed ethnic or racial interests. Indeed, while anti-orientalism was a highly visible element in the B.C. labour movement from its inception, it was being contested by rank and file socialists both on principle and on pragmatic grounds.

The year 1918 saw a massive general strike in Vancouver and throughout the Vancouver Islands coal fields in protest against the assassination of Ginger Goodwin, a leading labour unionist and draft resister. In 1919 more than ten thousand lumber workers were organized into the Lumber Workers Industrial Union which briefly became the largest labour union in the province. There was a socialist majority, briefly, even in the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council executive. Militants led many of the unions which had established themselves in the resources regions of the province.

The culmination was the foundation of the syndicalist One Big Union organization in March 1919, which briefly was the main labour organization in B.C. Symbolic of the inter-nationalist sentiment was the position of the B.C. Federation of Labour immediately preceding the foundation of the O.B.U. It held that "...this body recognizes no aliens but the capitalist" (Phillips,1966:78) Unfortunately the unions affiliated in the O.B.U. prevailed as a dominant force for only two years. A broad anti-union assault was mounted from the right.

By 1920 western Canada was in the grip of a severe depression which bottomed out in 1923. These years were marked by a sustained campaign against labour unions and against progressive forces in general. It was a period of intense political reaction, the depth of which varied from one country to another but which witnessed the establishment of fascist regimes in a number of European nations. In the U.S. mass deportations, arrests of labour leaders and socialists, anti-labour legislation and court injunctions, rabidly nativist evangelism and the rise of multi-million member vigilante organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan - all of these brought that country closer to fascism than at any time in its history. Removed as all this may seem from events in B.C. this was the larger context in which the spate of exclusionist legislation and resurgent anti-orientalism must be seen. The triumph of anti-oriental politics in B.C. was a provincial variant of a pan-North American movement.

Throughout the 1920s the strength of organized labour declined by a half and more in many areas. In B.C. the industrial unions which had been the basis of

the O.B.U. were progressively destroyed. The major affiliate, the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, joined the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World) in 1922 and gloriously faded away. By 1924 most of the union organization outside the greater Vancouver area had disappeared. It was mainly the craft unions in the larger cities which survived. These were exactly the loci of the most conservative forces in the labour movement.

"As the year 1921 progressed without any improvements in economic conditions and the union demands of shorter hours, public works and temporary relief went unheeded, the unions turned more and more to maintaining white employment at the expense of orientals. Led by the V.T.L.C. , the anti-oriental campaign spread rapidly around the province. The culmination of this movement was the formation of the Asiatic Exclusion League' by labour, soldier and merchant groups, including six unions of the V.T.L.C., while the president and secretary of the League were prominent members of the labour council" (Phillips, 1966:88)

However even within the V.T.L.C. active opposition to anti-orientalism continued and was to have effect by 1927.

While no lasting labour organization developed among Japanese workers in the lumber industry until 1920 a number of separate 'Protective and Benevolent' societies did exist in some of the larger sawmill complexes before World War One. Their nature, membership and activities - whether they existed under the control of or in opposition to Japanese bosses - in unknown to me. However

"Two major disputes were engaged in by the Japanese [lumber workers] during the war years, The first of these occurred on March 1, 1919, when all orientals -Chinese, Japanese and Hindu- shingle weavers and packers went out in protest to a reduction in wages. The

1,200 men involved returned to work a month and a half later at the old wage scale. The second strike occurred on May 10 in the combined saw and pulp mill at Swanson Bay. The Orientals (202 Chinese and Japanese workers) struck for equality of wage rates with white workers and for \$5.00 per day for yard labor. Work resumed in the shingle mill on May 17 and in the pulp mill on May 21, the company agreeing to an eight hour day with ten hours pay. (McLoughlin, 1951:142)

The further outcome of the Swanson Bay strike was the formation of the *Nihonjin Rodo Kumiai* (Japanese Camp and Mill Workers Union) and is part of Yoshida's story. So is the struggle of that union with various tendencies in the B.C. labour movement as they developed during the 1920s.

Something of the nature of the then contemporary labour scene is revealed in a 1921 report of a strike at the Alberta Lumber company in Vancouver mentioned by Yoshida. The Japanese sawmill workers there received twenty-five cents per hour and went out for equal pay with white workers.

"About 75 of them went on strike on February 12 After one day's stoppage the mill resumed operations with a crew of white men, who were paid 36 cents an hour for single men and 40 cents an hour for married men working a ten hour day. The Japanese working were joined by three white workers and the O.B.U., Local 1, picketed the approaches to the mill but work under the new arrangement without disturbance - 400 man days lost."B.C. Department of Labour, *Labor Report*, 1921:48)

In other cases a combined walkout of both white and Japanese workers occurred. For instance, in 1924 the 350 man work force of a large Victoria sawmill went out in opposition to a pay cut. Roughly half the crew were white, the remainder Japanese, Negotiations by the B.C. Minister of Labor ended the

strike after 2,200 man-days had been lost. However the pay cut was not rescinded (BC Department of Labor, *Labor Report* 1924:39)

Although these Japanese workers were not directly members of the Camp and Mill Workers Union it was supported by them under its policy to support strikes on jobs which included Japanese workers. The 1925 strike of Japanese sawmill workers at Port Alice for wage parity with white workers was led by the Camp and Mill Workers Union. Some improvements were won although Japanese workers remained in the lower paid rungs.

The year 1924 provides as typical a picture of Japanese labour in B.C. as is possible for the pre World War Two period . It was a time when Japanese had already experienced a roughly 40 percent reduction in certain fishing licenses and were experiencing restrictions in mining, construction and certain logging operations. The shift to employment in small shops, farms and owner-operated enterprises, which was to develop through the 1930s, had not yet occurred.

#### Japanese-Canadian Employment in B.C. -1924

(Compiled from T'ien-Fang Cheng, *Oriental Immigration in Canada*, 1931:197

Fishermen

2,500+

Logging and sawmill workers

2,733

Railway workers 611

Fish saltery workers 359

Farm laborers 430

Mining 232

Clerical employees 309

Domestic and hotel employees 590

Miscellaneous wage workers 316

Self employed (Gardeners, boat builders etc) 636

Farmers and orchardists

567

Merchants 396

Professionals (mainly within the Japanese community)

106.

The 'merchant' designation was comprised mainly of family sized grocery and similar stores but included about 60 larger companies utilizing hired labour.

In fishing, Japanese-Canadians seem to have held 1,162 salmon gillnet licenses. However quite variable figures for the total number of Japanese-Canadian fishermen and fishing licenses are offered by different studies, depending upon their political purpose, one suspects. Probably Gladstone (1959:121) is closest to the mark when he cites a figure of 2,525 Japanese-Canadian fishermen to all descriptions working under licenses in 1924. Presumably this includes those still operating under cannery licenses.

In addition to the income earning sector listed above there were 10,434 spouses, children, the aged and an undetermined number of crippled and unemployed.

The 1920s were also the main period of family formation among the Issei. Until 1908 over 90 percent of the Japanese immigrants to BC were single men. The 'Gentlemen's Agreement' of that year between Canada and Japan limited Japanese immigration to Canada to 400 persons a year but did not restrict the entry of wives. The system of 'picture bride' marriage developed to the extent that by 1920 there were more Japanese brides entering Canada than men. Picture bride arrangements were declared illegal for immigration purposes in 1928 and a quota of 150 Japanese immigrants to Canada per year was established.

The watershed of family formation was 1931, after which time there was a marked decline in the number of children born, In that year the 22,200 member Japanese population in B.C. was comprised of 11,477 Japan-born persons (of whom about 35 percent were women) and 10,728 Canada-born Nisei. (Adachi, 1976:386, 414).

The specifics of the mass of discriminatory legislation and policies toward Japanese-Canadians and other orientals is too complex to describe here. Adachi (1976) provides an outline and some revealing accounts of the public figures, organizations and strategies involved. Suffice it to say that they involved many of the leading individuals then in the province.

In the broadest summary, provincial legislation to bar oriental immigration and to exclude oriental labour from an increasing range of industries, as well as legislation to withhold the most basic civil rights for those of oriental extraction, issued from the BC legislature from the 1880s until after World War Two. These acts had a checkered history and were occasionally struck down as *ultra vires* in Federal courts or by the Privy Council. Over the longer run however the same ends were largely achieved by governmental administrative actions.

By the mid 1920s the legalistic force of the anti-oriental laws revolved mainly around the non-enfranchisement of orientals. Persons of oriental extraction in B.C. might be naturalized citizens or native-born Canadians but were not eligible to vote provincially. Since Federal voting rights were based upon provincial eligibility they were excluded from that arena as well.

Through various legalistic strategies based upon non-enfranchisement, Japanese-Canadians and other orientals were excluded from most of the professions - law, pharmacy, medicine and others. They were ineligible for employment in federal, provincial or municipal civil service jobs or indeed even to manual jobs involving public funding. This often extended even to exclusion of Japanese-Canadians from road and railway construction or on projects which involved mixed public and private monies. They were frozen out of handlogging on crown timber (i.e. in most of the provincial forests) or even in working for private companies utilizing such timber sources.

In addition, by the late 1920s many of the labour unions and virtually all of the craft unions had exclusionist clauses which barred orientals and kept them out of any remaining unionized jobs. A host of variably effective 'Gentlemen's agreements' limited the purchase of houses, shops and land by Japanese-Canadians in many areas.

Probably the most crucial and dramatic of the exclusionist measures was the reduction of the Japanese-Canadian fishing licenses during the 1920s. Fishing licenses and regulations were under Federal jurisdiction

but long agitation by white fishermen's organizations and a host of provincial politicians rising to power on anti-oriental demagoguery succeeded in converting the Federal government to a policy of progressively excluding Japanese-Canadian fishermen after 1922. The reduction in fishing licenses held by Japanese-Canadians was to be 40 percent the first year with 10 percent reductions after that until they were completely eliminated from the industry. Between 1922 and 1925 administrative action by the Federal Department of Fisheries reduced Japanese-held salmon gillnet licenses (the primary commercial license) from 1,989 to 1,015.

Legal actions launched by a number of Japanese-Canadian organizations in 1927 led to favorable decisions in the Supreme Court of Canada and the Privy Council in 1928 and 1929. This stabilized the number of Japanese-Canadian fishermen at about one-half of their previous level. However, the federal government in response to its defeat in court merely redrafted the original exclusionist clauses and gave the minister of fisheries full discretionary powers in the issuance of fishing licenses. Although no further reductions occurred, and indeed the number of Japanese-Canadian fishing licenses increased slightly in the 1930s, the threat of further restriction was ever present. (Adachi, 1976:142-145)

All these restrictions led to increasingly numbers of Japanese-Canadians entering that range of self-employed enterprises still open to them. The mid and later 1920s saw an increasing number of Japanese-Canadian workers shifting into small scale farming, opening a plethora of corner stores and starting a roster of service businesses such as laundering, gardening and so forth.. This process was intensified during the depression of the 1930s. By the mid 1930s there were approximately 700 mini-farms and about 860 'trading establishments', the vast majority corner store operations, owned and run by Japanese-Canadians (see Sumida, 1935). Despite this shift even by the end of the 1930s the majority of Japanese-Canadian income earners were still engaged in fishing or wage work.

Until the mid 1920s labour was a major force behind exclusionist legislation. In search of narrow and mistaken self-interest the orthodox unions and much of unorganized labour mobilized their voting clout behind anti-oriental campaigns. By the late 1920s and during the 1930s the main source of anti-orientalism however shifted from the organized working class to the lumpen bourgeoisie, small farmers and others who began to experience competition from Japanese forced out of wage labour.

A combination of factors finally led the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council to drop its anti-oriental position and affiliate the [Japanese] Camp and Mill Workers Union in 1927. Involved were the patient lobbying of the C.M..W.U., the continual efforts of union leaders like Ernest Winch and Angus McInnis and probably the declining power of organized labour during the 1920s no matter what it did. 13.

The Workers Party of Canada (later the Communist Party) and the Canadian Labor Party from their separate founding in 1921, formally opposed discrimination against any sector of the working class on the basis of race or creed. During the mid-1920s the Canadian Labor Party was a political voice of organized labor in Canada and included delegates from a shifting but not insignificant number of unions. Its demise came in 1927 because of the refusal of its national and regional executives to delete a standing resolution against oriental discrimination. Ironically, some of the same unions which withdrew their support from the Canadian Labor Party consented to the affiliation of the Camp and Mill Workers Union to the V.T.L.C. in the same year.

In 1931 the Camp and Mill Workers Union obtained a resolution from the National convention of the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress which committed that body to drop its specifically anti-oriental position. The T.L.C. also resolved to approach provincial and Federal governments for the removal of existing restrictions against Canadian-born and naturalized citizens of oriental descent. Resistance to that resolution continued with the T.L.C. mainly in a number of craft unions.

On the B.C. scene however anti-orientalism was officially repudiated by even the most orthodox unions. In 1935, on the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the Camp and Mill Workers Union, some nine greater Vancouver unions placed notices of support and congratulation in the C.M.W.U paper *The Daily People*. In that year the C.M.W.U. had eight locals (in Vancouver, Chemainus, Port Alberni, Sproat Lake, Great Central Lake, Okanagan, New Westminster and Alert Bay) with a membership of over 600. (Sumida, 1935:164). However some of the largest concentration of Japanese sawmill workers remained under local benevolent societies or Japanese bosses, as at Ocean Falls, Woodfibre, Fraser Mills and Royston. In the same year the T.L.C. chartered the [Japanese] Amalgamated Fishermen's Association which between then and 1942 participated in some dozen strikes with other T.L.C. affiliates ( McLoughlin,1951:124)

The Great Depression witnessed other, ultimately more vital, developments in the labour movement in B.C. One of these was the attempt to organized a broader-based fishermen's union. In 1930 more than a half dozen fishermen's unions and fraternal organizations existed along the B.C. coast - regionally and racially divided and often more concerned with defending their own limited prerogatives than in fighting the canning companies. The majority of fishermen remained effectively non-unionized.

In 1931, under the auspices of the Worker's Unity League, the expelled Vancouver local of the B.C. Fishermen's Protective Association was reorganized as the Fishermen's Industrial Union. It set out to organize *all* workers in the fishing industry, both fishermen and cannery workers, regardless of race, sex or national origin. By 1933 it had become the Fishermen and Cannery Workers Industrial Union with a membership of 1,500. It incorporated members of the Japanese Workers Protective Association, of the Chinese Workers Protective Association, some native Indian fishermen and cannery workers as well as white fishermen in eight locales reaching from Prince Rupert to Vancouver. (Gladstone, 1957: 172,174; Griffin, 1974: 9,11)

Between 1931 and 1936 the F.C.W.I.U, was involved in a number of strikes on the north and central coast. The 1936 strikes on the Skeena and at Rivers inlet were the most bitter, desperate and violent that had occurred in the fishing industry in thirty years. The Rivers inlet strike has now entered regional history in somewhat mythological form, since from the collapse of that strike the Pacific Coast Native Fishermen's Association was born. Centered at Alert Bay, this organization recruited many, but by no means all, Indian fishermen and later serves as a basis for the Native Brotherhood of B.C. It became a premier ethnic chauvinist organization.

During the next few years the F.C.W.I.U went through a series of transformations and name changes and emerged as the United Fishermen's Federal Union, with a separate cannery workers union allied with the T.L.C. The actions of its successor, the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, would have considerable importance for Japanese-Canadians after world War Two.

Throughout the late 1920s and during the 1930s there were a number of incidents in which Japanese and Chinese workers went out of strike in conjunction with white workers, both in organized and in spontaneous actions. They sometimes stayed out despite intense intimidation. The actions of Chinese quarry workers during the infamous strike at Blubber Bay in 1938, in support of the International Woodworkers of America attempts to organize and against terrible working conditions (Bergren, 1966: 119-121) Such campaigns were probably repeated many times over but have left hardly a footnote in labour histories in this province. Despite all these struggles and attempts at unity, a deep residue of racism persisted among many working people. This permits current members of various ethnic bourgeoisies to venomize about the working class in general and to defend current forms of exploitation.

### **Wartime Internment and After (1941-1949)**

The internment of virtually the entire Japanese-Canadian population between early 1942 and 1946, the effective confiscation of all their property, and the continued restriction on Japanese-Canadians from B.C.

until 1949 is too complex to detail here. Two excellent works already exist (Adachi, 1976 and LaViolette,1948)<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, a brief chronology in order.

As of 1941 some three quarters of the 22,000 Japanese-Canadians resident in B.C. were Canadian citizens, sixty percent of them native-born Canadians and fifteen percent naturalized citizens. Of the remaining twenty-five percent who were nationals of Japan many had already spent most of their adult lives working in B.C.

### Chronology

Dec.8, 1941. War declared with Japan.

Dec.8-11, 1941 All fishing boats of Japanese-Canadian fishermen impounded. Almost all are Canadian citizens.

Mid to end Dec.1941 Curfew imposed of Japanese-Canadians. All Japanese language newspapers banned. Shock and unemployment among Japanese-Canadians follows.

Jan. 1942 Mass agitation for the internment and deportation of all Japanese-Canadian citizens led by petite bourgeoisie organizations, chambers of commerce and their political representatives. Austin Taylor, an influential B.C. businessman, leads the agitation by the Vancouver elite. Newspapers naturally pontificate about sundry Japanese spies sabotaging National Defense

March 4, 1942. An order in Council (under the War Measures Act) is issued by the Federal government which proclaims a coastal area reaching about 100 miles inland from which all persons of Japanese extraction are to be removed, first voluntarily but shortly after through forced relocation. The process of detention has begun. A 'B.C. Security Commission' with Austin Taylor as the chief Commission is to oversee internment. Chaos in Vancouver Japanese community. All males from 18 to 45 years of age to be sent to camps to work on roads: their

parents, wives and children to be concentrated in ghost towns in the interior of province.

March to Nov. 1942 All Japanese-Canadians living outside the greater Vancouver area brought to a detained at Exhibition Park where up to 3,000 persons are held at a time. Families are broken up as men and family members dispersed to separate interior camps. Approximately 700 men who refuse to be parted from their families are forcibly sent to real prison camps in Ontario. 'Evacuees' permitted to take only 150 pounds of personal goods. The remainder of their other possessions are taken over 'in trust' by a Custodian of Enemy Alien Property, even though the great majority are Canadian citizens.

Summer - Fall 1942. The majority of married men in road camps are sent to build 'relocation camps' in interior in preparation to rejoining their families.

Summer 1943. The basic situation as it was to exist until 1946 now established. Some 14,000 internees are located in a few main areas: a dozen camps and ghost towns in the Slocan-Kootenay region, a few in the Lillooet-Bridge River area and a few more scattered elsewhere throughout the interior. The largest and worst camp is Tashme. Located 13 miles east of Hope. Tashme had 2,300 inhabitants and is later used as a centre for those whom the Canadian government intends to repatriate to Japan. There are also some 3,900 Japanese-Canadians who have 'voluntarily' moved to work in the sugar beet fields of Alberta and Manitoba, where conditions are noticeably worse than in the relocation camps. There are also some 900 men in real prison camps for refusing to be relocated as well as some younger Nisei who have been moved to Eastern Canada.

In the relocation camps there are a host of niggling restrictions: no drinking, no gambling, no fishing, no travel without a permit, no cameras, no radios. The real deprivation however is that all internees have lost control over the basic decisions affecting all major areas of their lives. The future is unpredictable as 'patriotic'

campaigns to deport Japanese-Canadians mount and the violation of all civil rights becomes transparent. Probably the greatest shock is felt by the Nisei and those who had acquired some material success.

Jan.1943 to late 1944. An order-in-council permits the Custodian of Enemy alien Property to dispose of all the possessions of the internees. In the course of less than a year the material accumulations of a lifetime of work are effectively confiscated. These include some 1,300 fishing boats, over a thousand motor vehicles, some 770 farms, more than 600 stores and business establishments, all Japanese-Canadian homes plus warehouses full of stored personal property. These are sold against the express wishes of the owners. Internees receive roughly ten percent of replacement value for these possessions.

Mid 1944 to Summer 1945. Federal policy encourages the movement of Nisei to Ontario but insecurity about families remaining in the camps ensures that relatively few leave. The Hon Howard Green and the entire Liberal-Tory cabal in B.C. raise the cry of total repatriation to Japan. At this point the C.C.F. is the only significant voice in defense of Japanese-Canadians. In April 1945 the R.C.M.P. systematically canvas the internment camps for 'voluntary' repatriation signatures. Frustration, anger and despair lead some 10,000 persons to sign.

Sept.2 1945 to Fall 1946. Japan surrenders, war ends, internment continues. Wartime measures and restriction as they affect internees continue until the summer of 1946. A move to cancel repatriation signatures begins. However between May and October 1946 about 4,000 Japanese are deported or repatriated to Japan. By the spring of 1946 the majority of internees are still in the internment camps. They are not permitted to remain in B.C. even though the majority were born there. Coastal B.C. remains closed to Japanese-Canadians for three more years.

Fall 1946 to Fall 1948. Some few thousand internees allowed to reside in interior of B.C.. By autumn 1947 the

remaining Japanese-Canadians are scattered throughout the prairie provinces and Ontario, where they try to make new starts. Public opinion, led finally by sections of organized labour, the C.C.F. and various church groups, begins to press for the removal of all racial restrictions.

April, 1949. Seven years after the start of internment and almost four years after the end of the war all legal restrictions against Japanese-Canadians are finally lifted. They are allowed to return to B.C. and enter fishing. All anti-oriental legislation is quashed and for the first time Canadian citizens of oriental extraction are given the franchise

Symptomatic of the changes which took place in the labour movement between the mid and late 1940s were those which occurred within the fishing industry. This industry had witnessed some of the most intense examples of inter-racial competition. By the summer of 1944 a struggle had developed within the ranks of the United Fishermen's Federal Union on the issue of Japanese exclusion. However by 1945 the more radical elements in the U.F.F.U reorganized and formed the present day United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, which set out to incorporate all elements in the fishing industry. Despite recurrent attempts from sections of its membership to introduce exclusionist clauses the U.F.A.W.U stood firm on its founding declaration to oppose all forms of discrimination and to be open to all workers in the industry regardless of race or creed. It incorporated the first Japanese fishermen to return to B.C. in 1949. A few years later Buck Suzuki, a Japanese-Canadian who had been active in unions and progressive movements from the late 1930s, was elected as vice-president of the U.F.A.W.U.

Considering the anti-Japanese views of many organized and unorganized fishermen at the time the U.F.A.W.U.'s move was a courageous one. The leadership of the Native Brotherhood on the other hand mounted a vociferous campaign for the perpetual exclusion of Japanese-Canadians from the industry. They, along with

their white counterparts, attempted to block the re-entry of Japanese-Canadians into fishing until 1950.

In 1948 the International Woodworkers of America (then the largest union in the province) strongly opposed the provincial Coalition government's attempt to maintain the oriental exclusionist aspects of the Crown Timber Act. About 800 Japanese-Canadians still living in the interior of the province were working in sawmills near their former internment camps. About a half were members of the I.W.A.

Only about a third of the former internees returned to coastal B.C. In the fishing industry there were only about 200 Japanese fishermen in 1950 and their number never grew to more than 1,000.

The leading political spokespersons for Japanese-Canadian internment and expulsion continued to play out their appointed roles. Some slipped into comfortable retirement or became elder statesmen in their respective parties. Others remained in the halls of power as M.Ps and Ministers of the Crown. One became Lieutenant-Governor of B.C. Howard Green, among the most vocal and unregenerate of the racist politicians, became Minister of External Affairs and the second most powerful man in the Diefenbaker cabinet during the late 1950s and early 1960s

### **Afterview**

A basic theme in most current ethnic histories is that each discoverable ethnic group retains some deep, unchangeable *volkgeist* which is essentially unique, a distinct way of perceiving the world. Even the most authentic ethnic histories tend to emphasize the particular aspects of a group's experience. While recognizing that cultural differences and experiences obviously do exist and are important, at least some histories should attempt to restore a recognition of the shared interests of working people of whichever origin. To that end let us consider some aspects of Ryuichi Yoshida's life and times within the context of working class experience in general.

The quality of much of Yoshida's day to day life as a fisherman, logger and worker was shared, in broad

outline, by large numbers of men who worked in the resource industries of B.C. during the period discussed. It is not possible to pursue those similarities and variations in less than a book but they were many - the daily demands, often the danger, of the jobs themselves, the isolation and a certain camaraderie of camp life itself, the pride which most men had in their skills. While they, like Yoshida, moved from camp to camp, most campworkers were enmeshed in networks of friends and workmates, variously cosmopolitan, which were province wide. Most felt that they maintained a degree of personal independence from the demands of specific employers and held a certain disdain for 'homeguards' who did not. While Yoshida's life evidenced a laudable degree of social commitment he was not especially unusual in his support of socialism and his understanding of existing exploitation.

One may hold that the wage differentials and the legislated job restrictions imposed on Japanese-Canadian workers constituted special degrees of exploitation. Such differences did indeed tend to divide elements of the working class. However, the exploitation faced by Japanese-Canadian workers was ultimately not strategically different from those experienced by many others. A great many resource workers in B.C. had life histories parallel to Yoshida's - histories of lives expended in dangerous, challenging and hard work rewarded with insecurity, marginal incomes and an insecure old age.

Similarly, it may be misleading to see the expropriation of Japanese-Canadian belongings during World War Two as a totally unique miscarriage of Canadian justice. Quite similar material consequences have been experienced by many others. For each Japanese-Canadian who lost his possessions during internment there are dozens if not hundreds of non-Japanese who in the previous generation had lost their lifetime savings, their homes and possessions. They lost farms and houses, fishing boats, their possessions and the means of earning a livelihood. They lost these just as relentlessly, just as unfairly, through the regular

workings of a capitalist system as through administered expropriation.

Indeed, large sections of the Canadian working class were so continuously and effectively plundered as never to be able to acquire much in the way of possessions to lose. To recognize this this is in no way to gloss over the nature of past racial oppression. But in our indignation over the particular case of anti-Japanese exactions we should not forget that it was simply an exacerbated example of vastly more widespread process.

The racism experienced by Japanese-Canadians and other orientals in the past undoubtedly did have a unique intensity. Racism however was not a unique experience limited to non-whites. During the period discussed most immigrant workers and identifiable members of non-dominant ethnic groups also faced comparable disabilities. The discrimination faced by many European immigrants during this period were undoubtedly less virulent than that experienced by orientals. But they can only be dismissed by those who have never been effected by it themselves.

Nor should we overlook the fact that there are often deep racist currents among immigrant groups as well. Japanese then often despised Chinese, Chinese often hated Japanese, the bourgeoisie of both groups had disdain for white workers and indeed for almost everyone else. Nor was the native Indian population of BC free from racist feelings, about immigrants in general and orientals in particular, as was evident in their support for the exclusion of Japanese from B.C. There was, and probably still is, enough ethnic hatred to go around for everyone, often just waiting off stage for the proper conditions to bring it forward. In this light those white Canadians who specifically rejected racist attitudes and opposed racist regulations seem doubly admirable.

## Footnotes

1. In a reflection near the end of the interview Ryuichi Yoshida mentioned a remarkable facet of his own background.

"At the time [of the Meiji Restoration] my grandfather was in charge of our village and looked after the storehouse for the rice. The land belonged to the Tokugawa family. It was called Heaven's land. It was supposed to produce 800 *koku* of rice for the Tokugawa family. Before the Emperor's army occupied the village my grandfather divided the rice among all the villagers; each one got some rice. So when the Emperor's army came the storehouse was empty. They were very ,very angry and took my grandfather to jail. He was about fifty years old then. After that he was against the Meiji Emperor all his life. All my family was against the Emperor. Myself, I did not share such feelings. I didn't pay much attention to that."

2. Some six months before Yoshida started to work on the railway section gang near Golden a snowslide killed 30 of the 58-man Japanese crew clearing track along the same line. (Adachi, 1976:93)

3. The pattern of certain boarding houses advancing room and board to resource workers and also acting as informal hiring halls was widespread in Vancouver until the 1930s. An interesting case is mentioned by Ronald Liversedge in which the initial 'office' of the Relief Project Workers Union was in the rarely paid up room of a Japanese-owned rooming house on Dunlevy street. (R. Liversedge, *Memoirs of the On-To Ottawa Trek*, 1974)

4. For an excellent account of the intricacies of cannery operation and fishing on the Skeena see William Ross' *Salmon Cannery Distribution on the Nass and Skeena Rivers of British Columbia, 1877-1926* (U.B.C.1967) Percy Gladstone's *Industrial Disputes in the Commercial Fisheries of British Columbia* (U.B.C. 1959) is still the most comprehensive history of unionism and conflict in that industry. Keith Ralston's *The 1900 Strike of Fraser River Sockeye Salmon Fishermen* ( U.BC.. 1965) is a superb overview of the conditions and forces involved

in the early fishing industry in B.C., focusing on the Fraser river.

The centre of the Skeena fishing-canning industry from the 1880s until about World War One was Port Essington, a booming seasonal town of several thousand during the peak season. Balmoral cannery, across the channel from Port Essington, was only one of the many canneries operating on the Skeena by 1910. The Japanese Skeena River Fishermen's Association had an office at Port Essington from about 1905 until the early 1930s. A small scale version of Powell street existed there as well as large numbers of local Indian and white Canadian workers during the season

5. Although a good deal of material on logging in B.C. of that period exists (see R.Knight's *Work Camps and Company Towns. A bibliography*, 1975) no true social history is yet available. The only material found on Japanese loggers and sawmill workers is a series of reworked memoirs in Kazuo Ito's *Issei. A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America (1974)* . Although edited from an arch conservative viewpoint it sometimes retains some authentic recollections of Issei who worked in the logging camps and sawmills of Alaska, Washington State and B.C. during the 1920s and earlier.

6. Isoo Abe, a former professor, was a co-founder of the first Social Democratic Party in Japan. An indefatigable lobbyist, he remained a social democrat throughout his active political life. He was a chairman of the Labour-Farmer Party during the early 1920s and later a leader of the Socialist Masses Party, until it was dissolved by military authorities in the 1930s.

Toshihiko Sakai, a journalist, was one of the leading figures of the syndicalist movement before World War One. A close associate of Shushi Kotoku, Sakai was imprisoned but managed to survive to help found the Japanese Communist Party in 1922. He was active in that party and in allied movements until the mid 1930s. Hajime Kawakami (not to be confused with an earlier author of travelogues, Karl Kiryoshi Kawakami) was a Marxist professor at Kyoto University in 1921. He

became the leader of the radical wing of the Labor-Farmer Party in the mid 1920s, the major left wing mass party of the interwar years. An indispensable source despite its title and style is George Totten's *The Social Democratic Movement in Pre War Japan*, 1966)

7. The Taisho period (1912-1926) witnessed a certain relaxation of repression of labour unions and reformist forces in general in Japan. It was a period of particularly rapid urban and industrial growth which began to stagnate towards the end of that era. The period witnessed the massive increase in factory workers and the first stirring of mass unionization. It also saw the growth of a substantial urban middle class.

One of the major events of the Taisho period were the Rice Riots of 1918. A series of almost spontaneous general strikes against intolerable food costs resulted in riots in more than 2,000 locales. One response was a brief shift to reformist strategies .

*Kaizo* (Renovation) was originally a small journal of reform-minded intellectuals but by the mid 1920s had become an organ of the Labor-Farmer Party. *Kaiho* (Emancipation) was a similar but more popular magazine given to publishing exposes of government policies, agitating for women's rights and reporting on the depressed conditions of workers, peasants and minority groups, such as the Eta. Both these magazines published a heterogeneous range of writers on the left.

8. Toshiko Tamura(1885-1945) grew up in the late Meiji demimonde. Very unusual for that period, she managed to become an influential writer Her short stories and novellas were known in literary circles before 1910 and she was considered a remarkable 'modern woman' of that time. "Furthermore, Toshiko chose the course of a woman as a human being like Nora (in Ibsen's *The Doll House* ) in her own real life as well, for she soon went abroad and was through with the literary world"(Okazaki, Y and Viglielmo,V. *Japanese Literature of the Meiji Era*, 1968: 266)

9. The 'C.C.F.' is Yoshida's designation for the whole spectrum of socialist political spokesmen for the period both before and after the founding of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in 1933.

10. While originally deleted Morii's name has been re-introduced into the text, partly at Yoshida's insistence. LaViolette (1948) and Adachi (1976) have already set forth similar charges. Morii was the owner of the Showa gambling club in Vancouver and he apparently did have a gang. According to Adachi Morii was first charged with murder in 1921 but received a suspended sentence on a reduced charge of manslaughter. He was an inside informer for the R.C.M.P. during their investigation and deportation of a number of illegal Japanese immigrants during the early 1930s. From the late 1920s until 1941 Morii held executive positions on the Japanese Association and was apparently a vocal proponent of Japanese imperialism. He was a central Japanese-Canadian figure for the B.C. Security Commission committee established to facilitate the internment process after March 4, 1942.

It is important to realize that such forces and leaders often evolve among minority groups, especially under ghettos conditions. It is also typical that such individuals frequently have special relations with the police.

11. By the mid 1920s a deepening depression gripped the Japanese economy, conjoined with a mass militancy by once quiescent peasant organizations and urban workers. There was an upsurge of strikes, land demonstrations and a growing militancy in the demands of diverse sectors of the Japanese population. The ruling sectors of Japan opted for a 'reverse course'; retrenchment, limitation of reforms and an increasing crescendo of repression beginning in 1926 and 1927. Nation-wide mass arrests of the leaders of peasant, union, women's and student organizations, as well of most leftwing party leaders occurred between 1928 to 1930. By 1931 the Japanese left was in disarray.

Some of the struggles, hopes, despair and anger of those times can be found in a collection of short stories

by eight Japanese writers in *The Cannery Boat and Other Stories*,. Takiji Kobayashi et. al (1931) A recent translation of Kobayashi's writing is presented in *The Factory Ship and the Absentee Landlord*, T.Kobayashi and Frank Motofui (1973)

Between 1931 and 1937, from the seizure of Manchuria by Japan to the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war, virtually all socialist and reformist groups in in Japan were suppressed or shifted into collaboration with the military dominated state.

12. A rich set of memoirs and historical documents which capture the conservative but human aspects of Steveston's Japanese community during the period is *Steveston Recollected* , Daphne Marlatt ed. (1975). However, as Yoshida's account should make clear, this was not the only component among the Issei.

13. Ernest Winch had been a major figure in the B.C. labour movement since before World War One, had been the organizing secretary of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union and was on the executive of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council during its radical years. He continued to be influential in various socialist and labour parties during the 1920s and was elected as an M.L.A. for the C.C.F from Vancouver East from 1933 until his retirement in the mid 1950s.

Angus McInnis was an important trade unionist in the Vancouver area, being the president of the Street and Electrical Railwaymen's Union from the pre World War One period, a position he held into the 1920s. He was also a major figure in the Canadian Labour Party and although he left that grouping in 1927 he managed to be elected as the first socialist M.P from Vancouver East. This helps one to understand how these two men could have been influential in reversing the V.T.L.C's position on admitting a Japanese-Canadian union. McInnis was also almost alone in defending Japanese-Canadians and calling into question the injustice of the Internment policy during the Second World War.

14. The classic account of the internment is Forrest LaViolette's *The Japanese-Canadians During World War Two* (1948). It provides a wealth of documents, alludes to the forces behind the internment and occasionally captures the tragedy behind the external events. (See the exchange of letters between one Mr. Kitigawa and the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property in LaViolette's appendix) LaViolette, however, drew upon few personal accounts by the internees themselves. Cautious as the book may appear today, even during the early 1950s it was sufficiently powerful as to be improper to discuss in 'serious' scholarly circles at the University of B.C.

Adachi's *The Enemy that Never Was*. (1976) places the internment in its background of anti-orientalism and provides numerous glimpses of life in the camps by some who experienced it. A few of those British Columbian leaders responsible for this long history of political rottenness are all too briefly mentioned by Adachi. One of the only memoirs in English we have of life in the internment camps is the gentle and fragmentary account by Shizuye Takashima, *A Child in a Prison Camp*. (1971). She and her family were interned at New Denver.

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