Homer Stevens.
A life in fishing

Rolf Knight and Homer Stevens

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Note. The present version was compiled in January of 1992 and is not exactly the same as the published one. In some cases the material is arranged slightly differently and occasional additional passages are present here. The appendix found here was deleted from the published account. However both versions are substantially the same.
INTRODUCTION

Homer Stevens' chronicle is a personal witness to a half century of involvement in the B.C. fishing industry both as a working fisherman and as a leader of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. It is told in his own words and is not intended as a formal history of that union or as a historical overview of the B.C. fishing industry. Yet it does weave elements of these topics together. Homer's account is rich in the past geography of the coast and speaks of changes and continuities in work and of economic struggles from first hand experience. Some will seem like distant history, some as if it happened just yesterday.

Attempts to bring trade union organization to the fishing industry go back, with varying periods of intensity, a half century before the formation of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union in the mid 1940s. In a sense, the UFAWU was the culmination of those earlier struggles to create an industrial union throughout the industry. Homer Stevens conveys some of the dynamics of everyday life in a trade union and first hand accounts of what organizing a union in the fishing industry involved. We learn of the mass participation on which the UFAWU was based and of the role of individual members in maintaining their union. We hear of the difference between well-intentioned resolutions and the endless, sometimes insurmountable, difficulties of putting those resolutions into effect.

The story begins in proper saga style with a genealogy of the people and background from which Stevens sprang. It sets the stage before the principal figures and events appear. This flows quite naturally from Homer's telling and seems the appropriate opening for the chronicle.

There are reminiscences of what a polyglot fishing community on the banks of the Fraser was like fifty and sixty years ago and what was entailed in making a living as a gillnet fisherman in that earlier industry. There is an evocative account of travelling the central B.C. coast during the 1950s with a memory log of fishermen's ports, coastal villages and the bustle of traffic as men and women crossed paths going to and from work in canneries which are now largely gone. There are accounts of political lobbying to bring some rationality to fisheries regulations and of the effects of changing economics and legislated chaos in the fishing industry. There is a moving personal description of relearning how to fish in the modern salmon industry which evokes the changes which have occurred and the continuities which persist.

To those unfamiliar with British Columbia of twenty-five to forty years ago the present account may not convey Homer's charismatic image in the B.C. labour movement. 'Homer Stevens' was a name which once immediately sprang to mind when one thought of a principled, incorruptible working class union leader. It is difficult to put one's finger exactly on what this charisma consisted of. What it was, I now think, was the simple fact
that Homer spoke honestly about his beliefs and spoke openly about conflicting class interests in Canada. He refused to be silenced by the ideological subservience which littered the highways and the byways of Canada during the cold war era. Far more people listened for his views than his leadership of one relatively small and embattled union might suggest.

For almost a generation the UFAWU faced not only the day to day tasks of union organization but also the hostility of an array of disparate forces. It was in mobilizing and directing the UFAWU’s membership in the struggle for survival as an independent and militant Canadian trade union which was Homer Steven’s major task and greatest achievement.

Each age seems to develop its own understandings of which issues are crucial and which are not, what constitutes justice rendered or unfulfilled. Similarly, there are changing views of what constitutes political heresy. The hard won understandings and loyalties of one generation are often discarded by a later one. For instance, those enamored of the current doctrines of ethnic nationalism, which hold that allegiances should be forged on racial and ethnic lines rather than on a class basis, will find some of the views presented here unacceptable. So be it.

A life history, as opposed to a biography, is told in the words of the individual himself. Editing has been mainly to achieve chronological and thematic continuity and apart from some brief paraphrases most of the text is in Homer’s own words. The body of the account was collected in taped interviews during 1986/87 with some additional commentary and final reflections added in 1991. I read the entire manuscript to Homer during the early spring of 1992 as he mended his nets, at which time final additions and modifications were made. This account is Homer’s unabashedly partisan view of the forces and events as they unfolded. No apologies tendered.

The fishing industry of the British Columbia coast has had more than its fair share of dedicated historians and impassioned memorialists. It is an extraordinarily complex industry in which just when you think that you understand some facets of its past you are confronted with additional intricacies. No single book will ever encompass everything which can be said about the commercial fishing industry here. Take this account for what it adds to our memory of the B.C. coast, the fisheries and canneries and the struggles of the people engaged in it over the past fifty years.

Rolf Knight
1.

A WEST COAST GENEALOGY

My grandfather was a Greek seaman by the name of Gjan Giannaris who had jumped ship in Vancouver when it was still called Gastown. After he jumped ship he was afraid he might be picked up and shipped back to Greece, so he took the name of Louie Larsen since he’d learned to speak some Norwegian on a Norwegian ship he’d been on previously. He then moved to the banks of the Fraser somewhere near New Westminster and started cutting firewood for sale. That was my father's father.

Sometime later he took on a job for a fellow by the name of Joseph King, freighting building material from Gastown over to King’s farm on Saltspring Island. When my grandfather got over there he decided to stay for a while and eventually acquired a piece of land right across the creek from King’s property. While setting up his homestead he met and soon married my grandmother, who was Joseph King’s sister-in-law. She was an Indian girl by the name of Emma, my grandmother, and they had seven children over in the Gulf Islands. My own father was born there in 1891 and that's where he grew up.

When my grandfather first started fishing on the Fraser he didn't have a proper fishing licence. I don’t know just how that worked but a lot of the immigrants fished without having a licence in their own name. I think he was working on a cannery licence for Alexander Ewen, whose cannery was near New Westminster just at the end of Annacis Island. Ewen's Cannery was still around but at the point of closing down when I was about six or seven because I recall going along with my father when he packed fish for it one summer.

In any case, after several years my grandfather pressed Ewen for a licence of his own. Finally Ewen said, "Well, alright. I'll see that you get a licence this coming year. Give me your full and proper name." Up to this time my grandfather had been going by the name of Louie Larsen but he wanted the licence in his real name. So he tried to spell it out in English with some resemblance to what it sounded like in Greek.

Ewen said, "That's going to cause too much trouble. What does your first name mean in Greek?"

"Gjan is the same as John, more or less"

"And what does Giannaris mean" asked Ewen.

"It means 'Big John'".

"That is ridiculous" said Ewen, because my grandfather was a short, swarthy Greek. "I'll call you John and I'll give you the good Scottish name of Stevens for the licence." So that's how he became John Stevens.

When the Royal Commission on the fishing industry held hearings here at the turn of the century my grandfather acted as a kind of translator for some of the immigrant fishermen who lived around Deas Island and Ladner. They held that handing out blocks of fishing licences to the canneries was unfair.
Not long ago Keith Ralston found some transcripts of the Commission's hearings where my grandfather was speaking and translating. One passage was really interesting to me because it involved a guy I remembered from my own childhood, a fisherman by the name of Louie Macaferri. His native language was Italian but he spoke a kind of English with machine-gun rapidity, repeating a lot of the words. I could understand him because I'd grown up around him, but it was quite a task at times. In this Royal Commission, Macaferri is giving evidence in Italian and my grandfather is interpreting it to the judge. My grandfather wasn't all that adept in English and he didn't understand Italian all that well either; in fact my mother's family claimed he spoke it 'like a dog.' So I wondered about the court recorder trying to get all this down as evidence. How he ever translated that into proper English and what sorts of things got changed or dropped along the way. There must have been some broad reinterpretations.

But the main thrust came through clear enough. It was that the way the licensing was handled was unfair to the non Anglo-Saxon fishermen. The great majority of them didn't have licences in their own names and were delivering their sockeye to the canneries at five cents a piece less than those caught by the others. That meant something like a ten to twenty per cent price cut below the then prevailing prices. They were against a system in which the companies got a block of fishing licences and were able to control fishermen that way. That was ultimately changed, here on the Fraser for a start, and they introduced a system of individual fishing licences.

My grandmother's family originated in the Victoria-Esquimalt area but when her sister married into the King family on Salt Spring Island Emma moved over there. She seemed to have family connections in the Cowichan area as well. I remember her telling me that when she and my grandfather built their first house on Salt Spring Island they went to get lumber at the mill at Crofton and she borrowed two large dugout canoes from some relatives of hers at Chemainus to bring the lumber back.

One of her stories was about how they piled lumber across these canoes and towed them behind their row boat. They just rowed when the tide was with them and tied up to the beach and held the canoes when the tide was running against them. When they got to Salt Spring they still had to pack the lumber about a half mile up a hill to their house site. Shortly after, my grandfather took off to do sturgeon fishing in the Pitt River leaving her to work on the house herself, which she did with the help of a carpenter she'd hired. So she was a pretty resourceful woman.

My grandparents had split up before I was born and my grandmother had remarried a man who had been a sealer, George Shepherd. As a young kid I used to spend part of the summer with my grandmother over on the Saanich Peninsula and part with my grandfather on Salt Spring Island. Emma was living just off the Indian reserve by Patricia Bay, near where the airport is today. I remember going out in the canoe with her and my aunt Caroline and she taught me how to spear fish and dig clams. I was old enough to handle the fish spear but barely big enough to use a paddle.

My grandmother and her second husband and my aunt were then living at the edge of the Patricia Bay reserve. I don't know if George Shepherd was a status Indian - I don't
think so. He was what you might call a Metis today. So far as I know he never did live on a reserve himself. I suppose that in both marriages my grandmother had lost her Indian status, first by marrying John Stevens and then George Shepherd. She was part of the Indian community but not a member of the reserve.

I was always curious about George Shepherd, who was still alive well into my own school years. He’d worked on the sealing schooners going up to the Bering Sea. I think he’d been a hunter on those voyages. He told me stories of his sealing experiences; of the schooners leaking badly and the crew’s quarters wet and cold most of the time. Stories about them being out amid the ice and the fog coming down when they were out in the small boats and not knowing where the schooner was, listening for the ship’s bell and trying to get back. I learned that a lot of them didn’t come back and were lost at sea. He probably told me the names of the boats he’d been out on but I don’t remember them now. He had spent some part of his life working in the woods as well because he knew quite a bit about that. But by the time I knew him he was retired.

As far as my grandmother’s life before she was married was concerned, that always remained pretty much of a mystery. Even when I’d ask her questions about it as a grown man she was quite vague about her childhood. My father and my aunts would have known more about that. But Emma was more interested in telling about the time when she and my grandfather were living on the farm on Saltspring Island and coming over to fish salmon on the Fraser.

They’d come across from the Gulf Islands by oar and sail —so it was a fair trip. They had a summer cabin here on Deas Island, amid the Greek fishing community. Later on, when they had a family, my grandmother would usually stay on the farm on Saltspring taking care of the kids while he went fishing. But in the early years she’d come across and fish with him during the salmon season. I gather that she taught him a lot about how to catch salmon.

She used to think it quite funny that when the sockeye run was just about at its peak, in late July, the berries would be ripe over on Saltspring Island and she would want to go back and pick berries. They would have an argument over that. My grandfather couldn’t see giving up part of his summer fishing earnings for berries, which he thought were useless, but she felt that getting berries was very important.

Another story she had was about how they were crossing the Gulf on a hot windless day with my grandfather sweating and pulling at the oars and cursing. They’d been coming up to this huge cedar log for quite a while. It was floating high in the water and the side exposed to the sun had dried out. So my grandmother asked, "John, would you like a cup of tea?"

He swore some more and told her not to talk crazy, because they had no stove or any means of making a fire on a boat like that. She told him to row over to this log; she climbed aboard it, chopped up some kindling with an axe, made a fire on top of the log and boiled up a pot of tea. It gave her great satisfaction in telling about incidents like that in later years.
Those were the kinds of reminiscences she would talk about, everyday events and funny happenings in her married years. I don't remember her talking about her life before she was married.

Emma could speak Songhees and my father knew some of the language too. Enough to josh back and forth to get a conversation started. But he was raised in an environment where English would have to have been the common denominator. A couple of my uncles could get along in Chinook jargon a bit too. It was still used, to some degree, in a cannery just a half mile down the road when I was growing up. I remember hearing it spoken down around the dock of Stump's cannery.

My grandparents were old but still quite active when I was a boy. My grandfather finally came over to Port Guichon and stayed with my aunt the last years of this life, when he was in his late seventies. He was beginning to get a bit senile then. He'd be wandering around the dyke, digging out old nets and wanting to get a boat ready to go fishing. So he was active enough that way.

My grandmother was even more vigorous. She lived to be ninety nine years of age and only died in 1970; as close as we could reckon she had been born in about 1871. It was only in the last four or five years of her life that she was no longer capable of looking after herself. She hated having to be taken care of in a home and she didn't believe in living with any of her sons and daughters. She always got some kind of shack of her own and looked after herself till near the last.

In my father's family two of my uncles, Peter and Andrew, continued to live on the old homestead on Saltspring Island. They jointly owned and worked one seine boat or another over the years. They got into sheep ranching around Fulford Harbour for quite a few years and only gave that up when they physically just couldn't manage it any more. But they're both still alive and still live on Saltspring. I used to see them quite a bit when I spent my summers on the homestead as a kid.

Of my aunts, I knew Irene best because she lived here in Port Guichon and was always over visiting as I was growing up. She is a very warm hearted person and worried about the degree of discipline that I had to live under. Caroline was my father's half sister, my aunt through my grandmother's marriage to George Shepherd. She later married an Indian from the Chemainus reserve. She died just a couple of years ago but as a girl she was one of those people who read a lot of poetry and I remember her reciting Pauline Johnson's *The Cattle Thief* to me when I was a kid.

Lena, who was the oldest of my grandmother's family, I didn't know at all when I was a child. She had left home when my grandfather and grandmother split up and went up to the interior and got a job as a school teacher although she was only sixteen. She passed herself off as being older and stayed with teaching until she retired. When I finally met Lena, as a young man, I found that she had studied a whole raft of languages and had become a supporter of the L.P.P. Which really amazed me.

My mother, Mary, was born in Canada but her parents came from a little town called Lusina Picolo, now called Lussinj Mali. It's on one of those islands on the border
between Yugoslavia and Italy and has changed hands many times. But the rest of her brothers and sisters were born here.

My mother was around sixteen years of age when she married her first husband, John Cosulich, who was a fisherman on the Fraser. They had three children - Ronald, who was ten years older than me, Ruth about eight years older, and John who was seven years old when he was drowned in the river right in front of our house. They were living in Port Guichon when her first husband died in the flu epidemic which followed World War One. Mary married my father in 1921 and I was born in 1923, the oldest of the second family.

Mary was the kind of person whose whole life centered around her family. She grew a big garden and put herself at the center of all the things which the kids were doing as they were growing up. She loved to cook, although lots of times during the winter it was 'Fraser River Turkey' - salt salmon and spuds. But when there were a few dollars available she'd splurge and put on big meals for the family and friends. It seemed like there were always other people sitting down at the table with us - friends, relatives, and people who just happened to drop by. It gave her satisfaction to be able to do that.

Although she was born in Canada and grew up speaking English my mother also spoke Croatian and Italian, which she'd learned from her mother. That was Nicoleta Sileck, who was a very staunch Catholic and a very strict disciplinarian. She was a widow and lived with us when I was growing up.

There were a lot of different languages spoken around me as I was growing up. Most people I knew spoke more than one language. They'd be spoken in different contexts and for different purposes. For instance in my own family, Nicoleta used to talk to my mother in Italian. At the time I played with the Radoslovich's boy who later drowned here. His mother spoke Italian in the home and after a while I began to understand it to some extent. So then my mother and Nicoleta switched over to Croatian, which I never did learn, whenever I wasn't supposed to understand what they were talking about.

My mother's two brothers also lived near us when I was growing up. John and Mitch Sileck were both fishermen and active in what fishermen's unions there were around then. Mitch was mainly a gillnet fisherman and was married to my father's sister, Irene. He was a big man and would fish the running tides out here in the river, making set after set, when you pulled the net by hand. But he had a terrible temper that used to get the best of him at times. Underneath he was actually a very soft hearted guy but there were times when I was young that I was almost terrified by his outbursts of anger.

John remained a bachelor and lived in our house until he moved into an old scow house up on the dyke. He was away on seiners and draggers a good part of the time. John was the skipper of a dragger for a while and could do just about everything that there was to be done with boats - a very talented guy despite not having any formal education. He could take almost any kind of engine, strip it down, put it together again and make it work.

There was a lot of competition between those two brothers - over how much fish each of them had caught or over their relative strength or over almost anything. They were both big bruisers. Although they never used their fists on each other I recall them getting into a
rage over some little slight and just about wrecking a net shed, rolling around and wrestling each other like a pair of grizzly bears. But they were part and parcel of my family as I was growing up.

When I was very young my father was going up to Rivers Inlet during the season to fish. He was then a gillnet fisherman but had worked on salmon and herring seiners and in other sectors of the fishing industry. I think he'd fished in every inlet from here to the other side of Rivers Inlet in his early years. There were very few places on the coast that he didn't seem to know about.

I once remember him coming back from Rivers Inlet after putting in the season there and my mother asking him how he had made out, very quietly so none of us kids would hear. "Not too good," he said. "I think I might have a hundred dollars coming." That was for the entire fishing season.

My father was a person who loved a good story. He had a wonderful memory for stories that other people had told him as well as being able to recount his own experiences of travelling up and down the coast. I remember him going on and on when we were on his boat, from one story to the next. I suppose that's what attracted me to going out on the boat as much as anything else when I was young. They were just stories to me as a child. In later years, when I began to take a wider interest in that, I wished I'd have questioned people in my family more and found out in more detail about their lives and understandings. But it left me with a sort of legacy, though not something I can really piece together.
2.

GROWING UP IN PORT GUICHON

Port Guichon, when I was growing up, was a separate community from Ladner. It had been the rail head in Delta, the port where lumber barques and sailing vessels had once tied up. Ladner and Port Guichon were fairly isolated from the city of Vancouver even in my time. You had to travel by ferry to Woodward's Landing and then go in by car from there, at a time when relatively few fishermen owned cars. So rather than going all the way in to Vancouver we often used to take our own boat to New Westminster to do our major shopping. For fishing gear we'd go over to Steveston. This would be at the beginning of the thirties when I'd be seven or eight years of age.

My family had one of the oldest houses in Port Guichon. We lived adjacent to a large sawmill and planing mill which stood where my own house is today. The crew in that sawmill consisted primarily of Chinese and the East Indians workers but there were others from just about every nationality around here. Right across the road was a row of bunkhouses where many of the single East Indian workers lived. Up the road was a settlement then known as Chinatown, which had its own stores and entertainment facilities and such. There were some Chinese families there but the balance were single men. Most of them combined work in the sawmill, when they could get it, with work elsewhere. Some worked as hired labor for the large farmers in the area. That Chinatown burned down in a fire later and the population scattered elsewhere.

Port Guichon was a mixture of families; some of whom had come in and settled here about the time Delta was first dyked and had some large farms. The Guichon family, after which the settlement was named, was among the first and most prominent. There were also fishermen, some of whom lived in what were called 'scow houses' which originally could be towed from place to place. But the scows had the tendency of rotting out and sinking so most of the houses had been winched up over the beach and were sitting up on the dyke. Other fishermen, like my own family, had acquired enough land to be able to grow much of the food they needed in large gardens.

We were a distinct community in Port Guichon. Ladner was a mainly Anglo-Saxon community while we were a polyglot of just about everything. There were a fair number of Yugoslav-Canadians and Italians and a few from Albania and Spain. There was a small Greek community on Deas Island but mainly they were all mixed in among others. People from all over it seemed.

My father also had some friends on the Chuwwassen reserve here both through being a fisherman and through being part Indian himself. There was the Williams family who I knew quite well as a boy. Pete Jacobs was a close friend of my father and I became good friends with Ricky, his son. I used to go down to the beach there to swim in the saltwater. There used to be a little church there, which is gone now, but the graveyard is still there.
Some of the problems which existed here at the time I was growing up had to do with racism. Some divisions were based on ethnic and racial differences and others on religion and as a child I can remember facing outright discrimination when I went to Ladner. While I was young, playing with kids from whatever kind of background around Port Guichon, it didn't seem to matter. But when we got to school the various kinds of discrimination really emerged and hit you.

All of us kids were Canadian born but that's not the way certain teachers saw it. Before I started school my father told me to say I was Canadian if I were asked because that's what we were. He must have known what I'd run into. One of the things I remember happening was when the doctor came to the school and our teacher asked us to stand up according to what our ethnic background was. I told her I was Canadian -- but that didn't count. After asking me some questions she was determined that she was going to classify me as Greek. Well I knew I wasn't Greek!

There was another teacher who gave my older brother a strapping once and in the course of it called him "a little black Austrian" and other remarks like that. It was obviously a racial slur. When my father heard that he went up and stopped this teacher in the street and raised hell with him. The teacher said he couldn't help the way he felt. He later became the principal of that school. But as a result of my father laying down the law to this teacher I didn't get that kind of treatment.

We knew this teacher and the way he bullied other children and I made up my mind that when I was bigger and stronger I was going to beat that guy up. But I never did. It wasn't unusual for kids to want to deal with a few of their teachers in that way. Many years later, after I was married and we already had our first son, I was coming back home on the ferry on which this teacher was then working. I'd never said anything to him about how I felt but for one reason or another he came over and after a bit says " You never did like me, did you?" So with that I tore into him. I told him he never should have had the right to teach children given the way he had carried on. It didn't do any good then but it made me feel better.

You might think that a place like Port Guichon was insulated from the worst of the depression. Well, it was and it wasn't. Although it may have been a little better here, with somewhat fewer men having to take to the rails and travel back and forth across the country than they did elsewhere, it was still a very grim situation. In fact the community was hit pretty hard. The fishing industry was extremely depressed; fishermen were fishing Pink salmon for as low as one cent a fish and Chum salmon for two cents.

As I grew up there was endless discussion among my family and their friends about the need to do something to get better price agreements for fish from the packing companies. There really weren't any basic contracts that were effective coast-wide. You weren't even assured that the canneries would take all the Pinks you caught at the height of the run. Or they would slash prices when they had a lot of fish coming in. So those were topics I constantly heard discussed.

As far as scraping things together during those tough years, our family and others salted a lot of fish in barrels and traded salted and smoked salmon for potatoes or
whatever from farmers. The canneries would take all the sockeye and cohoe you caught but in the latter part of the season they weren't interested in Chums or White Springs. So we'd salt down salmon and trade with the farmers for the surpluses they couldn't get rid of.

My father used to go to the Gulf Islands to fish for Rock Cod and Ling Cod and Sole or dig clams after the salmon season. He'd bring the fresh fish back and go around Delta peddling it to people. We, myself and some of my brothers and sisters, sometimes went over with him when he made his trips to the Gulf Islands. It seemed like there was an endless procession of trips being made back and forth when I was growing up. There was always a possibility of doing something around the Gulf Islands throughout the year, it seemed. More than was possible here.

People would get together to get wood to heat their houses. Groups would try to prevail upon one of the seine boat owners to go out and tow back small booms of logs they'd cut or rounded up. There'd be individuals cutting up firewood all along the beach here.

I started going out on fish boats during the summer with my older brother and my father when I was eight or nine years old. By the time I was twelve and thirteen I felt quite capable of running a boat. That was the way it was with most kids of my acquaintance, who went out fishing with their fathers or brothers as much as they could.

I was pretty big for my age at twelve and used to go out with my father on his packer and did a lot of pitching of fish. I'd already been handling the nets on my older brother's boat by then. But that wasn't unusual amongst sons in fishermen's families. You developed the muscle and ability to do that kind of work younger than they do nowadays.

I was raised in the Roman Catholic church and believed in the existence of God and the teachings of the church and even served as an acolyte, one of the boys who serves the priest at the altar. But when I was thirteen or so I began to wonder about the contradiction - that we were all supposed to be brothers and sisters yet there was all this hostility and division phrased in terms of religion. That was in the back of my mind anyway. It might not have come to a head so soon if it weren't for the sermons that our priest started preaching.

This was about the time when the war in Spain was getting to be an important topic to many of the people we knew. My father had become an active supporter of the C.C.F. He had been raised as a Catholic but had broken with the church long before and only went to church for social occasions, for a wedding or a funeral or such.

Now this priest started pounding away at the Godless Socialists and preaching about how Franco was fighting to save people from the Reds. He'd rage against socialism in general and against the C.C.F. here in Delta. I just couldn't accept that; it was personal as much as philosophical. I came to a decision to break from the church. It wasn't easy. There was a lot of conflict in that decision.

When I announced at home that I wasn't going to go to church anymore my mother was terribly upset and said she wouldn't hear of it. Her mother, Nicoleta, and my older sister too - it was something they wouldn't accept. It came to a head and there was one long, hot argument where finally my father slammed his fist down on the table and said, "You've
had him up till now but now he's beginning to think for himself. That's it!” So my
decision stood.

Leaving the church seemed to be tied up with dealing with a lot of myths about how
people were supposedly different and why they were in conflict with each other. The
understandings I was groping for only came over the years and not in the same ways.
There were many contradictions between what I felt and what I understood about the
various antagonisms which existed here.

As a matter of fact, when I was fifteen or sixteen I became involved in a set-to with a
group of Japanese fishermen who had come from Steveston to fish here. They had
worked the drifts down river but as the water started to clear they moved up into where we
fished. All the non-Japanese fishermen here got together on the drift one night and
started corking the Japanese fishermen that had come upriver. That conflict was phrased
mainly in terms of racial antagonism although the underlying reasons for it were
economic. Anyway, after all I've been telling you, I myself got involved in this episode of
corking these Japanese fishermen.

So the understanding that fishermen of different groups were basically all working
people trying to get by as best they could only came to me gradually. The understanding
that economics were the basis, that different people were fighting each other and despising
each other while really fighting over the crumbs. That people were operating with
misconceptions which were completely extraneous and were really fighting each other
over the necessity of making a living in these situations.

Sport became important to me during my high school years. I played on the
Tsawassen lacrosse team for some seasons and was quite good at it. We had a four-team
league here in Delta--Tsawwassen, Westham Island, Ladner and East Delta. And we
played a pretty competitive game with the other teams at Memorial Park in Ladner.
Lacrosse was a big sport among fishermen then.

In high school I wound up speaking in a lot of school debates, which were part of our
education. They were sometimes a bit stacked but you could make whatever arguments
you wanted to defend your position. For instance, a debate to discuss the relative merits of
'Socialism, Fascism and Democracy', democracy being what we had in Canada, naturally.
But it did provide some experience in public speaking. In those debates you wouldn't
swing the opinions of many kids; that was determined basically by the views of their
families. As far as I can recall there were only three or four other students in the class
whose parents supported the CCF, which was then considered very left wing by the local
establishment. A high percentage of fishermen did support the CCF, but not many of their
children went to high school. At the end of the thirties and the beginning of the forties it
was still fairly unusual for the son of a fisherman to be in high school. A lot of the kids I
started school with dropped out at grades seven and eight to go to work. So those who
were in high school were a different lot than those you'd know around Port Guichon.

My father had quit school in grade five but he valued self education and an
independence of mind. Although he encouraged me to read and form my own ideas a lot
of my views must have come from him and from my uncles, directly or indirectly. Although I didn't fully recognize that then.

My father was then a member of the CCF but he had belonged to one of the earlier socialist organizations some time before. I think it may have been DeLeon's Socialist Labor Party but I'm not sure. When I was a kid he used to get a newspaper called *Appeal to Reason* that came from the United States. He also had a fair library of books like *Looking Backward* and others which he was always trying to get me to read but I don't think I did, mainly, until I was older.

I also learned a fair amount from some of the old timers who lived along the dyke. Many of them were then retired or semi retired so they liked company. Some had been deep sea sailors who had sailed half way around the world in their time. Pete Coy would tell his stories about the Barbary Coast in Frisco and how he had never tasted sarsaparilla then because it was the same price as whiskey and he wasn't going to waste his money on soft drinks. Frank Turner told us something about his early years fishing and working out of Victoria when it had its own Barbary Coast district.

There were stories about actual sailing experiences, some of them from a fellow by the name of Clarence Hooker who was originally from Australia and had worked on sailing ships and been around the world a few times and had sailed around Cape Horn. There were seamen's tall tales plus their memories of the dangers and miseries of working the ships. There were other kinds of stories from Martin Doyle who talked about his years with a six gun down in the American West, which we later found were mainly ones he'd read in cowboy magazines.

There were all kinds of people from different parts of Canada and from around the world who had settled in Port Guichon. Many of them had a quite broad perspective. They may not have been all that well read but they understood the class struggle to a large extent. When I would tell them about some of our debates in school someone might say, "Ah that's a sort of Scissor Bill line." But they encouraged me to stand up for what I believed in and while they differed and argued amongst themselves I learned a lot from them.

I suppose I largely reflected the things I'd heard around my family. That was quite different from what we were taught in school. For instance, what the British Empire stood for and how glorious it was. I'd get into arguments with my teachers on some point or another over that. Some of it now seems so infantile that I hardly know how to recapture it.

Most of the people in Port Guichon didn't consider that they had any special ties with the British Empire since they'd come from all kinds of different backgrounds. But the community was by no means of one mind about that. There were some who did feel themselves a part of the Empire. Martin Doyle, a fisherman and a good friend of my family and part and parcel of the community, he supported the British Empire no matter where or what it did. The arguments that used to go on between him and my father were endless.
I started fishing on my own during the summer holidays of 1936, when I was thirteen years old. I fished with an old boat of my father's, gillnetting on the stretch of river near our house. At first my mother was dead set against it. She was very worried for me, having lost John, her son by her first marriage, in the river some years earlier. Also, Anthony Radoslovich, a boy I'd played with, was drowned there when he was about six. So she wouldn't let me go out fishing at first without taking my elder sister along to sort of watch out for me. But Ruth had her own plans and didn't want to be tied down to being on a small, leaky boat through the summer. So, eventually I got a friend of hers, Jimmy Thomson, to come out with me to satisfy my mother.

Jimmy was about three years older than me and my mother thought, or at least she hoped, that he'd have a little more sense and concern for our safety. So she said I could fish as long as he was aboard. But basically I ran the boat and decided how to use the net. I was still forbidden to go out into the Gulf with it so we fished on the Fraser from here to the mouth.

By that time my father was mainly employed in collecting fish for B.C. Packers. So he wasn't there to supervise my fishing. It wasn't that different than the work I'd been doing with him and my uncles but I was on my own and it was quite an experience.

First of all, I was using the oldest and rottenest boat on the river, or so it seemed. It was a boat called the *Tar Box*, which would have sunk every second day unless I made sure I pumped it out. The amount of fish I caught during my first season wasn't all that great. It seems to me that I may have earned fifty or sixty dollars clear for the entire season.

I was given a net which was just about falling apart. The old linen nets only had a life span of two or three years useful life, depending on how they were looked after. They had to be bluestoned, soaked in a copper sulfate solution, every week or they'd rot away on you.

There were different mesh sizes and nets for different sorts of salmon fishing. They were all thick compared to present day nylon nets. The linen nets came in an off-white colour to be used in the rivers. If you wanted some colour for different fishing you'd go to the fish companies and dump your net into their dye tanks for a while. If you didn't like the result you could make it a darker green or you could try to bleach it out a bit. Everything required a lot of hands on work. We carved our own corks from cedar blocks, tarred and hung them. Most fishermen built their own nets from webbing they hung. It's a slow process and doing that net work made you doubly conscious of snags you might tangle with.

Basically, a snag is something that will rip and tear your nets all to hell. I remember catching just about every snag that there was to be caught in the river and ripping my net time and again. A snag might be an old tree stump which has come down the river and...
gotten embedded on the bottom. Sometimes it might be a whole log and in some places along the river bank there were stubs of old pilings. The river bank had eroded away and it looked like part of the channel; but there was something down there. Some times we didn't even know what the snag was. Snags can be almost anywhere in shallow water. They are always changing, because the river brings down new ones over the winter. The spring floods would cover some snags over and bring some new ones down. The Federal Government maintained a steam powered sternwheeler called the *Samson* which had huge davits in the front end and powerful winches to yard the snags out. But there were always enough left.

When they started fishing in the spring many fishermen would put an old net on, figuring that they were going to pick up the odd new snag that hadn't been there the year before. If they snagged it they wouldn't ruin their new net, which they tried to save for later on in the season when there were more fish. By the time the main run came in we all knew where the main snags were. But that didn't mean that you didn't catch them.

There was one area around here that we all had to watch out for; that was at the top end of Kirkland Island. It's about a half mile down river from the present day Massey tunnel. Along that beach nobody fished. It was an area we tried to keep away from. The problem was that there was some good fishing just above that stretch, along the edge of Deas Island. We all fished that, on what we called The Stump Drift. There was one huge stump way up high on the bank, that we used as a 'towhead', a place where we went up and took our turns setting our nets out. If you happened to get into good fishing, with more fish in your net than you expected, and couldn't get your net up in time and drifted down into that mess of snags above Kirkland Island, well, you could forget about that part of the net you still had out. Whatever net you had out was almost impossible to get back in.

I learned about that long before I started fishing myself. I was out helping my older brother gillnetting when I was nine and ten years old. He caught a snag above Kirkland Island once just with the tail end of his net. The second time he caught one of those snags with his anchor.

Since we then didn't have a power drum you stopped your engine once the net was out. The net would drift down river and then you picked it up by hand. He had just barely got his net aboard in time and went inside to start the engine, but it wouldn't start. It was an old Frisco-Standard, a single cylinder job, and he couldn't get it going. So he ran up to the bow and dropped the anchor and started working on the engine.

For all he fought with it he just couldn't get the engine going. He could get pretty vile tempered. He got so mad that he threw things overboard; things that he shouldn't have. His lantern went sailing over the side and a few dishes and what not. 'I'll throw you over, you bastard', he growled at one point. I thought he might be talking to me and crawled up to the bow of the boat as far away as I could get. But he was talking to the engine.

Eventually he did get it started and went to pull up the anchor but found he couldn't. He was a big man who stood six foot four and was very broad across at the shoulders. He pulled the bow of the boat a couple of feet down into the water. He fastened the anchor line to the cleat in the bow and gunned the boat in one direction and then the other but still
couldn't pull the anchor loose. So he'd hooked on to one of those big snags. Eventually he
grabbed a butcher knife and chopped his anchor line off. That was the end of that. But it
always remained in my mind, of what you could get into around that stretch of river.
There were a few other spots like that, down at Westham Island for instance.

Those were the kinds of things you learned growing up in a fishing family then,
working with your relatives. They were like craft skills and quite important, especially if
you later fished in the waters you knew.

When I started fishing on my own we had five day a week openings on the Fraser and
we tried to work as long as we possibly could. It was pretty hard work and neither of us
had our full strength yet. On one occasion Jimmy and I both fell asleep on the drift. We'd
fished pretty steadily and sometimes during the middle of the week, at night, we got to
arguing about whose turn it was to get some sleep. There wasn't a cabin on the boat only a
covering at the bow where you could get some shelter. I crawled in, dead tired, saying it
was my turn and Jimmy crawled in right after me saying it was his and we ended up
drifting down river and catching the Westham Island bridge with our net.

We woke up in time to start picking the net, pulling the net by hand over the stern
roller. I was pulling for all I was worth. There was only room in the stern for one person
so Jimmy got the idea that he would back the boat into the net to make it easier for me to
pick. Through a combination of things the net got fouled in the propeller. By the time we
had that sorted out we had fifty fathoms of net strung right across the bridge footings and
lost just about that whole piece of net. But that was all part of learning how to fish and we
kept with it.

I'm trying to think back on how I felt about it all at the time. Part of the feeling was that
I was now - A Man. It was pretty hard work but you had to prove that you were able to do
something like that to be accepted by your peers, those who were a bit older than you.

I remember some awfully silly things too, like getting into an argument with Jimmy one
day over the anchor we had. The line on it had parted but I had sliced it back together
again. What I didn't know was that it had parted in two places. When we came to the head
of the drift we had to wait and take our turn to set the net out. "OK. Jimmy, throw the
anchor" I said.

"But the line's parted", he answers.

"Who the hell is captain of this boat? Throw the anchor." I yell back.

So he did- and we spent the next two hours dragging for it with our net, till we finally
hooked it and got it back up.

Other than the engine itself there was practically no mechanical gear on any of those
gillnet boats. We even carried oars because if you had a breakdown those boats were
small enough and light enough that you could row them. More than once I, and others,
had to row to some place where we could drop the anchor till we got the engine going
again. You never saw a gillnetter in those years that didn't have a set of long sweeps on
deck. No one carries those now. Although at times I've thought that it would be handy to
have a set of oars aboard, because even modern equipment goes haywire.
We didn't have any electronic gear and in fact we didn't really have electricity. There was a tiny light inside the cabin which ran off a battery and there were electric running lights but in most cases we'd light up with coal oil lanterns.

There was no ice on those old gillnetters so you delivered your fish every day to a fish collector or to the cannery dock. If you happened to hit good fishing you'd have to deliver a couple of times in a day. The boat I finally had, the \textit{Black Marauder}, was just an oversized skiff with a cabin on it. I remember loading it down to the point where I had about three inches of freeboard. You kept it afloat by pumping. We had a wooden hand pump about four inches square with a handle and you'd be pulling the whole weight of the water up and spilling it out over the deck. In case that got plugged we also had what we called a tin pump, which was nothing more than a round metal pipe with a valve at the bottom and a washer on a plunger. So, if you had a leaky boat you were spending about a third of your time pumping to keep it from sinking.

Just hauling in the nets in a regular set was hard physical labour. But there were times, when you were fishing out in the Gulf and got into a blow, more often then not you'd have to ride it out because you wouldn't be able to pull the net in. You'd strain to pick up a few feet of net and the next sea would yank it back out again. The \textit{Black Marauder} was more or less flat bottomed and squaresterned - it'd be slapping and banging in the seas out in the Gulf.

The accommodation on those boats was almost nonexistent. There was barely room to crawl in to the bunk. Sometimes I'd catch a little sleep, figuring I had my net out in a safe spot. I had just about enough space to lay flat in the bunk up in the bow. But I wouldn't pull my boots off in case I had to get up in a hurry. I'd wake up with my legs so cramped up I couldn't move anyway. During the first two days fishing each week I could take a twenty minute snooze and still wake up. But after that it got to the stage where I couldn't wake up so I just stayed awake. At the end of the week I came in and more than once slept the clock around.

Coming in from the Gulf against running tides would take an hour from the mouth of the river to Port Guichon. Often I didn't really know what I'd seen coming up the river. I was so tired that I would drop off and wake up just in time so that I wouldn't run into the beach. There were many instances of fishermen who fell asleep at the wheel and ran on to sand bars or into pilings and so such when coming back from a week of fishing. Even when going from one set to another on the river here.

I don't remember ever falling asleep while actually working. The adrenaline seems to keep on pumping and you seem to be able to keep on going while you're actually doing the work. But as soon as you start to travel, the regular motion and the steady rumble of the engine, you drop off to sleep fast. On the gillnetter I wouldn't stay at the wheel for an hour without getting out of the cabin. On the old gillnetters there was a wheel inside the cabin and another one on deck. When I got tired, it didn't matter what the weather was like, raining or not, day or night, I'd go and steer out on deck. With the fresh air blowing in your face you can normally stay awake.
Fishermen develop an ability to cope with a lack of sleep, I'm not exceptional in that regard. But when I'm home in the winter now I put in a full eight hours sleep and if I feel like it I'll even have a nap in the middle of the day.

Those of us who lived around Port Guichon and Ladner tended to fish on the edge of the Fraser, on the mouth at Canoe Pass and in the lower main channel. There were some old side channels too that had started to silt up. The tendency for salmon, especially of Sockeye, would be to try to go up through those old channels.

When the tide was low the salmon would be waiting out in the Gulf, just on the edge of the river. With the linen nets it was virtually impossible to catch them during the day in the clearer salt water. In seining that didn't matter so much but the fish could see our gillnets and would just swim around them. So we would wait at these channels and then, when we thought it was just about right for the fish to start coming in, we'd lay our nets out from the sides.

There were places where these half silted-in channels led into the larger channels and we got some pretty good catches there. I once got something like twenty five hundred Sockeye in one four day opening. Sometimes, in very shallow water, I got as many as five hundred Sockeye in a single set. It was an amazing thing in a way.

Until I gradually learned I wasn't sure exactly where to set the net. I remember going up to one of the old timers who was laying at anchor on the inside edge of one of these channels. He was sitting in the stern and I went up to chat with him. I noticed that every once in a while he dropped a little piece of bark over the side and watched it drift away. I finally realized what he was doing was trying to judge when that tide was slack. You can't go by the tide book. The weather conditions have quite an effect on the tide. Whether there is a southeaster or a westerly outside can make the tide vary as much as a half hour or an hour at times. But eventually you learn how to judge that.

When you do set across one of those channels everything is absolutely dead. There's not a sign of anything moving. Your net is in water so shallow that your boat is almost aground. And these boats we had didn't draw more than two or three feet of water empty. There were times I would jump out of the stern into the channel, carry as much of the net as I could back to the higher part of the bar and then set the balance out. You just sit there and watch; everything would be quiet. Then, just as the tide turned, the fish would start to hit and the whole cork line would go white with fish rushing into it. They'd hit the net with such momentum that they'd sink the cork line and you could see the backs of some of the Sockeye going right over the top of your net and getting into nets behind you. You'd might get as many as fifteen hundred in the matter of three or four sets. The rest of the time you were setting for ten or fifteen fish at a time.

What sorts of hopes and expectations did I have? Well, there were a lot of things mixed together, only some of them having to do with fishing. In terms of fishing they were the normal ones. Wracking my brain over how and when I could get a boat capable of running up the coast to Rivers Inlet or the Nass to fish, like my uncles did. Alternately, I'd consider how I might get on one of the seiners and work for shares. Those kinds of things.
Except for the first two years when Jimmy Thomson was with me, from 1938 to 1945 I
gillnetted on my own. Occasionally somebody came along for a day or two but I didn't
have a deckhand. I fished the Gulf of Georgia over to the Gulf Islands but mainly I stayed
fairly close to the Fraser.

I wasn't unaccustomed to the idea of women working on boats because my mother went
along with my father quite a bit when he was packing fish. She used to come along
occasionally to cook and lend a hand when I was helping my father run his packer. Then
too, there was my grandmother Emma. She had gone fishing with my grandfather for
quite a few years and I think had taught him some of the fundamentals of salmon fishing.
It's always been quite usual to see wives and sisters working on many of the Indian fish
boats along the coast.

There was a young woman who lived just down the street, Violet Radoslovich, who used
to go out on the draggers with her older brother and with my father. Violet was a really
good deckhand and did the same kind of work as anyone else; she could do just about
anything that had to be done on a dragger. Eventually she got her own gillnet boat here on
the Fraser and did quite well at it. That would be in the early and mid forties.

But most of the Yugoslav fishermen, who made up a big portion of the fishermen
around here, had a dread of having women on their boats. If a woman even walked down
on the float where nets were spread out, if she stepped over a net rather than walking
around it, there would be all kinds of shouting from fishermen. It was thought to be
unlucky.

If fact Violet was about the only woman fishing around here. That wasn't because
women couldn't have done fishing but because many fishermen here had a deep set
superstition about them being on the fish boats. There was another young woman I knew
at the time who came out with me a few times when I was gillnetting. She was born into a
fisherman's family and she was eager to get out fishing - it was what she most wanted to
do. But she couldn't get any of her own relatives in the Yugoslav community to take her
out on a boat under any circumstances.

I didn't consider myself as being a qualified gillnet fishermen until after about five years
of fishing. It was only by 1941 that I'd gotten hold of what it was all about. By then I was
among the top twenty five percent of gillnet fishermen on the Fraser in terms of annual
catch. I'd put in the season gillnetting salmon and then went out in the winter on a
dragger. That was ten years of fishing before I went to work for the union in the spring of
'46.

The thing which was coming through to me was the low prices being paid for fish and
the way the canners kept it down. We used to start off with what seemed like a fairly
reasonable price for Sockeye. At the beginning of the season the price for Sockeye
would perhaps be fifteen cents a fish higher than when the main run came in. Just when
you thought you'd be able to earn something for all that you'd put into it, the price would
be slashed. Every fishermen said that we had to get a price that was fixed for the whole
season to prevent the companies from slashing prices as the season progressed.
The same thing would happen in the fall, when the Pinks and Chums arrived. As soon as the bulk of the run would come in the canners would slash the prices way down. So it hardly seemed to matter how hard anyone worked or how much fish they caught: hardly anyone ended the season with much money. Whenever they needed new nets or gear or some major repairs to the boat, most fishermen weren't ahead of the game enough to pay for it out of their pocket and had to go to one of the fish companies to finance what they needed.

As a sidelight, for what it says about the nature of the industry and the state of organization at the time, one of the things that occurred during the 1936 season when I first started fishing was the strike at Rivers Inlet. That was a bitter strike which was one of the beginnings of industrial unionism in the fishing industry, from what I've read about it later. My older brother was involved in it. But the communications were so poor that we down here hardly knew about the strike. There was no activity on the Fraser to back up the striking fishermen at Rivers Inlet. Here we had brothers and friends on strike, in a major battle which involved the use of the Provincial Police, and we were mainly ignorant about it while it was actually going on.

I learned something about the history of unionism in the fishing industry here from one of the old-time fishermen, a fellow by the name of Marko Vidulich, who lived down on Canoe Pass. He'd been in the big strike here on the river in 1900 and had known and actually been on the picket line with Frank Rogers. By the time he retired Marko had more than sixty years of fishing and trade union experience behind him.

He'd tell stories like how they had operated their picket boat here during one of those early strikes. They'd rigged their boat up with four sets of oars and manned it with eight of the biggest and strongest fishermen they had, and there were some big brutes of men in those days. They patrolled up and down the river during a strike and if they caught anybody fishing they'd seize their fish and nets. They ran into their difficulties doing that, with the canners bringing in the militia over in Steveston and such. But they played what cards they had. They did what was necessary and managed to survive.

Much later, when we had the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, we managed to mass some pretty big picket lines and were able to persuade strikebreakers, by our numbers mainly, that they shouldn't do it. We cautioned our members against anything that could be brought into court against us as physical intimidation because it played into the hands of the companies.

During one strike in the late forties Marko wouldn't go out on the picket line. He was old but he was vigorous and fished for many years after that. I was sort of disappointed and told him he wasn't setting a very good example, being one of the senior men in the local. Marko said, "I'll do other things but I'm not going out there and watch these scabs fishing whenever they like. With your style of picketing they still get away with all the fish they've caught. That's no way to carry on". So that was one kind of sentiment lingering on even before we had an effective union organization. It could be quite appealing to me as a young man.
COMING OF AGE

When the Second World War broke out my father felt that it was just another imperialist war. That's the way I felt too. During the last two years of high school I argued with teachers about what the war was about. My attitude and the kinds of phrases I'd use were 'that the people on both sides were just being used as cannon fodder by the munitions makers,' what we might call the 'military-industrial complex' today. It was an old and widely held view among socialists then. I got into some great rows.

It was a very chaotic period of trying to think things through. Two conflicting ideas were being expressed. The main thing I believed for a long while was that the war was just an attempt by the capitalist class to break free of the depression. That was the essence of one pole of the debate. The other pole was 'what do you do to stop fascism from spreading?' My thoughts weren't all that clear on it at the time.

Remember too, we didn't necessarily know what was really happening behind the scenes or on the various war fronts or what post war policies were being elaborated. You don't necessarily know what is going on at the time it's happening - things I since have read about.

I can't now recapture the actual changes in my feelings about the war. It was a gradual thing for me. I recall people I knew talking about the first year as a phoney war and that sooner or later there would be an attack on the Soviet Union. There were mixed thoughts. There was a shift taking place in my mind and a lot of other peoples minds - that what had been just an imperialist war to start with had become a war against fascism.

Even at that age I had no illusions about what Churchill and the forces like him stood for; that if he could he'd try to get the allied armies to march east after Hitler had been defeated. But I came to accept that the first priority was to defeat fascism, otherwise the single socialist country in the world might be defeated and the world would again be totally dominated by some combination of imperialist powers.

I left school and went fishing on the draggers in January of 1941 but I figured that I'd be drafted in about a year or so. I had gotten my call-up notice while I was working on the dragger but my father suggested that I apply for a deferment from the War Production Board as being engaged in an essential industry. Which I did. After about a year of deferments, with a lot of my school chums going into one branch of the services or another, I decided that I was going to join up. I applied to the Air Force to become a pilot but when I took my medical they told me I had a sight problem in one eye and that there was no chance I'd ever be a pilot or get on an aircrew.

After that I applied to the Navy and said I'd like to get in the Fishermen's Reserve, which was a kind of Coast Guard that had been patched together here. They told me that there was no way I'd get into the Fishermen's Reserve because there was a line up a mile long. So I applied to join the regular Navy but there was a waiting list for that too. It
seemed very strange because this was now the end of 1942 or early 1943. The draft was being used mainly to fill the Army.

I wasn't eager to go slogging around in the Army and had visions of the trench warfare I'd heard about in World War One. So I just kept reapplying for these six months deferments as a fisherman and getting them.

The most crucial discussions I had were with a fellow by the name of Wass Turple, who came out and fished with me for the best part of a week. We spent hours and hours going over the whole question of the war and what I should do. I remember phoning the Air Force and Navy again after that to see if they would take me. By this time my younger brother had been drafted and I thought for sure I'd be next. But I wasn't called up.

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To go back a bit, when I was seventeen going on eighteen, Frank Radoslovich approached me about going dragging with him on the B.C.Kid, the seine boat his father owned. So I quit school before finishing my last year and went dragging. We left here in January of '41 and travelled over to the Gulf Islands to fish. I was both the youngest aboard and also a greenhorn at dragging. Even though I'd grown up with the other members of the crew the tendency is to ride the newcomer, no matter what. So I got my share of that.

Frank had me handling the winch pretty soon. This old winch was a home-made job that ran off a dog clutch and to get it in and out of gear you had to brake it down, otherwise it would jump. Not long after we had started fishing I gave it too much slack and the wire came off the block, got jammed in beside the sheaves and sheared off. We lost the whole trawl (i.e. the cable, nets, boards etc.) - almost everything. The skipper was fit to burst. Here we'd come out and just started fishing and we'd lost the trawl. He took a strip off me up one side and down the other and sure let me know it was my fault. To my mind it was because that god damn winch was haywire but I didn't dare say anything and just had to take the abuse.

Well, we dragged for the trawl. We snapped off the points of our grappling irons on the rocks so we were reduced to using the small spare anchor, which had only one fluke and about a four inch stub on the other side. Finally it was that stub that caught a kink in the wire of the trawl and we managed to haul it up and hook onto it. The skipper was shouting "Don't lose it, don't let it go!"

Frank Radoslovich was one of the first to go dragging at night. We had no sonar or radar, really almost no navigational equipment other than the compass. Nothing except the skill and experience of the skipper to keep you off the rocks and reefs that are scattered around. Frank was good at it. Many nights I couldn't see enough to figure out where the hell we were but he was right on the tracks.
Some nights we dragged almost uselessly but at other times, at the end of a few sets, we'd have dogfish piled on deck half up the side of the cabin. This would be in early February and there wasn't much else to be caught there by dragging but dogfish. They'd be piled on deck three and four feet high if we got a couple of good sets.

Every couple of days we'd deliver them to collector scows at Deep Bay. When we first put in there I couldn't believe the stench as we came around the point, those dogfish for the reduction plant lying in huge piles on the dock and in the scows, half rotten.

This was just prior to the use of dogfish liver to manufacture Vitamin A. They were then running dogfish through the reduction process for fish meal, which was used as an additive in various animal feeds. A short while later the livers were worth far more than the dogfish itself. The following year we livered the fish on the boat and just dumped the carcasses overboard. We delivered the livers in four gallon tins to Western Fish Oil, a small plant in Vancouver beside LaPointe pier. When we came off the boat - this was after having washed up and changed out of our work clothes - everybody in the streetcar would move as far away from us as they could get. Yet we hardly smelt it by then.

Near the end of February another boat from Port Guichon came out to join us to fish for Starry Flounder. Before that nobody wanted them, we used to get them in the trawl but there was no market for them. But the owner of the boat had gotten a contract to fish flounder at a cent and a half a pound. So we sailed over to Barkley Sound and the West Coast of Vancouver Island to drag for flounder.

These were small seine boats in comparison to today's dragers. They'd been rigged to trawl during the winter and when we got into the offshore waters, with the size of the seas that could be running, there were many days when we couldn't fish at all. We'd go out in the morning and find we had to turn around and go back in, to put in for shelter at places like Esperanza and Clayoquot. That was after having gotten up to get ready to fish at three or four in the morning and having spent most of the day with hardly an opportunity to put the trawl in.

We'd go into Clayoquot, which was just across the inlet from Tofino and consisted of a beer parlour and hotel and a general store when I first saw it in 1941. There was a dock and a walkway with a small trolley on it, which was used mainly to transfer cases of beer from the dock to the pub. Usually it was only fishermen that we met there but once in a while we'd meet miners who were waiting for the Maquinna to come and take them out. She only made the run once every week or so.

One time we went in and tied up at the dock, eight of us on two boats from Port Guichon, and a fellow came along and says, "You'd better not go up there. There's a bunch of miners there and they've been drinking for three days. They're about ready for a fight."

"Ah well," we said, "We shouldn't have any trouble."

When we went in every table was piled high with beer and cases of beer were sitting alongside. But we found a place to sit down. These miners were pretty stakey and would hardly let us buy a beer through the whole evening. They were singing songs and carrying on in general. Today there isn't anything left at Clayoquot, nothing at all.
We fished a combination of things at different times; sometimes dogfish and other times flounder or sole and Ling cod. The problem with fishing for sole or Ling cod then was that there was a limited market in Vancouver. Unless you trawled year round you weren't part of what was called the Campbell Avenue group. They were trawlers that delivered to Campbell Avenue dock fish buyers, who had most of the flat fish market sewed up. So most of the time we had to chase dogfish, which we did fairly successfully.

We trawled over on the West Coast into June. Then the boats came in to be refitted for seining. Those of us who were gillnet men got our own boats and gear ready for the salmon runs, which we would fish over the summer into fall. So there wasn't that much time during the year when you weren't fishing or preparing to fish one thing or another.

When the war in the Pacific began we were out trawling and the first steps in the internment took place while we were away. Ucluelet, on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, had a population of Japanese-Canadian fishermen who were all removed during the early part of 1942. We may even have been fishing in the general vicinity at the time. Normally we didn't put in at Ucluelet so I can't say that I ever got to know the people there or at Tofino. But most of the time we didn't know what was going on anywhere when we were out dragging.

The impact, for me, was more local. What I saw happening here in Delta to Japanese families I had known. Although the internment wasn't such a rapid process, over all, it could happen very quickly in any particular area.

My own feelings were a kind of disbelief. This would be in the late spring of '42.

It just seemed unreal. That people born and raised here were just being deported to camps. Maybe the biggest shock was when I found that the whole Maeda family, who I had been closest to, having gone to school with Deo and Eiji and George and the girls, when - all of a sudden - they were gone. I didn't actually see them go, but all of a sudden they were just gone.

But there other responses too, which you could hear all along the Fraser. "Now we've got more room. We don't have to compete with the Japanese anymore." And more openly racist remarks too.

There was a touch of hysteria to it as well. An elderly Japanese-Canadian was living here who had long since retired from fishing and who carved duck decoys out of cedar blocks. He didn't speak much English but he was a friendly old guy. They weren't the fanciest decoys in the world but they served the purpose. I had bought a set from him and so had one of my chums.

Well, one day during that time he was testing some of his decoys on the shallows of the river, right in front of his own place. Trying them out to see how they floated with a bit of lead weight. Old Martin Doyle pointed and said to me, "Look, he's taking soundings?"

"What for?" I said, although I already could guess what he meant.

"In case they want to bring submarines up the river," Doyle answered.
"Who the hell would be so foolish as to try to bring a submarine up here. There's barely enough water to float a fishboat."

But that fear of a Japanese invasion was very strong and it was being drummed up by the press. Later on, during the crisis over conscription, some people thought that this hysteria was being used in order to make conscription easier to push through.

But those attitudes continued and had to be fought during the formation of the United Fishermen's and Allied Workers Union. There was the sentiment that "Now we've got the river to ourselves. If they hadn't been removed the Japanese would have taken over the whole river". There was also the contradiction between what people said and did in particular circumstances.

Sometime before the Japanese-Canadians were interned my father had been talking to the owner of a boat called the Lillac Two. My father's own boat was getting pretty old and he was looking for something bigger and newer to collect fish with. I was keen on that myself because during the summer, when I helped him out on the packer, it seemed like I pumped half the Fraser river through his leaky old tub. With a load of fish aboard you were pumping almost steady to keep her afloat. He had approached the owner and they were dickering about the deal when the boat was seized by the government. We later found that the government administrator had sold the boat for much less than the $2,500 my father had offered the owner.

But about a year or so later on we went up to where the boats seized from the Japanese-Canadian fishermen were moored. There was a whole fleet of boats just down river from New Westminster, none of which had been looked after. Some were half filled with water and others had been stripped for parts. Some had sunk and been raised again and were in a hell of a state.

Finally he did buy a boat from that fleet. The Merle had been used as a cod boat and had live cod tanks. It was a pretty old boat but it could still be used as a fish collector around the Fraser when there was a heavy run of fish. She had an old two cylinder Vivian engine in her and he used her mainly for packing Pinks and Chums when those runs came in. I don't know what my father paid for it but it must have been pretty low because he didn't have much money even with a loan.

When the Japanese-Canadian fishermen were removed the fish companies immediately sent recruiters to central Canada to recruit fishermen to take the place of the Japanese. I ran into quite a few fishermen from Lake Winnipeg and Lake Winnipegosis, people of Icelandic background. The companies also recruited some Cree and Metis fishermen from northern Alberta.

They certainly weren't a full replacement in terms of knowing the techniques and the conditions that applied here. The fishing they were used to doing was quite different from how you have to fish here. When these guys first started fishing here I remember seeing an awful lot of gear piled up on the jetties, especially when there was a fast tide running out of the Fraser. Some of the things that happened to these newly recruited fishermen were comical in a way.
Once I was coming down the river and noticed one of these lake fishermen in difficulty. I could see that although he was picking up his net he was nevertheless going to catch the Sand's Head Light buoy, at the mouth of the Fraser. He did catch it and his net parted. It just snapped and away it went with his lantern and flagpole. He'd picked up maybe a third of his net by then and an end of that was still hung up on the buoy, until it too let loose. I came up to him and hollered that he'd better chase after his net because there was a ferry coming across which might cut the rest of his net to pieces.

"It's gone. My net's gone", he yells.

"No", I says "It's drifting down over there," and I pointed in the direction I'd seen it going down the river.

But he shook his fist at the channel buoy, which was above us now, "No, that thing came alone and took it. It's going up river with it," he says.

He was so confused that he thought the buoy was moving and had grabbed his net and was headed up river. Finally I persuaded him that he better go pick up his net.

So, while quite a few men were recruited into the fishing industry they didn't fully take up the slack during the war years. It took them a while to get experience with the conditions here even when they were fishermen.

*

Sometime in early 1943, while we were dragging, the old Imperial Atlas engine in the B.C. Kid broke down. We couldn't get the replacement parts we needed from the States so we were tied up for the balance of the season. The following year Frank Radoslovich left to skipper a bigger boat owned by one of his uncles and as a result I was approached to run the B.C. Kid.

Actually, I wasn't too keen on the idea since I felt it was a bit much for me, being not yet twenty. It was a combination of the responsibility for the boat and how I'd act as skipper with people who were both older and more experienced than me. But first of all I didn't think my navigation was good enough. Up till then I had taken my trick at the wheel but I'd left the navigation to Frank. Travelling along the west coast of Vancouver Island was relatively simple once you got to know the headlands and points. But amongst the inlets and channels and islands, half the time I was only guessing where we were. I also wasn't sure that I'd know enough about setting gear under whatever conditions might come up. I was the least likely person on the boat to become skipper.

The two senior men on the crew didn't want to take on the job. One was a Danish fisherman by the name of Eric Jensen. He was old enough to be my father and had run draggers along the coast and had worked deep sea and knew a fair bit about navigation, as well as everything else. Eric had his own gillnet boat that he fished with in the summer. He said he'd come along as the cook but he wasn't interested in being skipper. The other man was about five or six years older than me, also with more experience, but he didn't want the job either.
The owner, Andrew Radoslovich, said he thought I could handle it and that he had confidence I would look after the boat. So finally I agreed to give it a try.

Then old Andrew sat down with me and with paper and pencil proceeded to describe the bottom of this boat in detail. He described where a bulge was- because she didn't have a straight keel. He went over just what had to be done in the event you had to beach her some place, say because you'd holed her on a rock somewhere. If you beached her how you'd have to put in wedges, otherwise you'd break her back. And how I should put extra webbing over the side to protect her belly. "She's an old boat" he said, "So you've got to be careful with her".

After he'd described how to list her in the proper way and about hanging webbing over the side and under her belly so she'd rest comfortably and so forth, I was less confident about the whole idea than before he started. "Andrew, it sounds like you expect me to hit every rock from here to the Queen Charlottes," I said. He wiped his big black mustache and answered, "Well, I don't know why you shouldn't. I've done it," and sort of laughed.

I got hold of books on navigation and while I can't say that I understood everything I at least learned something more than I'd known. We left Port Guichon sometime in mid January with the idea of starting to fish for sole around Skidegate, in the Charlottes, around the first of February. The sole come into Skidegate inlet to spawn at that time. We were pooled with three other draggers who had made an arrangement with the Canadian Fish Company to sell all our catch at two and a half cents a pound.

So we sailed; four boats from Port Guichon travelling together. We were the slowest of the four and they were strung out way ahead of us up the coast. Throughout the trip I'm practicing my navigation from point to point. We got into Captain's Cove from where we were going to cross over to the Charlottes but a hell of a blow came up that blew steady for three days and nights. Hecate Strait, even in relatively good weather, is something to be treated with respect.

There was a big steam tug lying in the cove, the Morgan, which towed Davis rafts across the Straits. We went over to this tug in a skiff and asked what weather reports he had over his radio. We had just a little home radio aboard that didn't pick up anything. He said that he didn't get much in the way of weather reports himself there. "But when you see me get steam up you pick up your anchor and follow us out. I'll go out as far as the buoy and if it looks okay I'll give her a blast of black smoke. If you see that, it's okay, keep coming. If you don't see that, then don't come out." We had no two way radio and he had no other way of communicating with us. That was still quite typical then.

Though the wind had dropped, when he got out in the Strait it was nothing but 'haystacks.' That's when the sea is piled up in pointed cones rather than crested waves, the aftereffects of winds from two different directions.

As we're crossing I noticed Eric Jensen looking around the boat for something. "What are you looking for Eric?" I ask him. He's looking for some spikes, and eventually he found some eight inch nails which he used to nail the hatch covers down. As far as I could see they were already well fastened with strongbacks and covered with lashed down
tarps. But he'd nailed clean through them both. "Jesus. We'll never get those spikes out. Old Andrew is going to be pretty hostile when he finds those nail holes," I said.

"Well, that might be", says Eric, "But the hatches aren't coming off in the middle of Hecate Straits somewhere".

Eric had a lot of experience. He'd worked deep sea as well as on fish boats and had skippered boats of various sizes. He undertook to train me in navigation event hough he was the cook. At times we'd leave in foggy weather and he'd be checking my courses all the time, checking how far we'd gotten, where we were and so on. He had a wealth of knowledge about how to get out of tough situations.

When we got over to Skidegate we started fishing right away. We snagged up the first net and had to put on the brand new net that we'd made up before we'd left. But we couldn't catch anything with it, just gobs and gobs of kelp. After a while the engineer asked if I was on the marks. There were prominent coastal markers in the vicinity of Skidegate and you lined them up with certain points or hills to set the direction of your trawl. It was a simple kind of dragging and as far as I could see there was no way to mistake the marks there.

This went on for a day and a half until we hauled the net off on the dock and found we'd built the net wrong. There wasn't enough web in it to allow the top line to rise and the top of the trawl was closing off and preventing us from getting the fish. So we had to rebuild the net on the dock there before we could continue fishing.

We operated the dragger with four men. This was a side beam dragger we fished with, much smaller and more primitive than the trawlers you have today. They can easily bring in five or more times the amount of fish than we could. There's a lot they do by machinery which we did by hand and they have refrigerated hatches, so the handling of fish is less difficult than it was then.

Eric was the cook, although he also worked handling the fish. Then there was the engineer, a deck hand and the skipper. When we were setting gear it was all hands on deck; one handling the winch and two handling the gear that had to go over the side.

After we'd hauled up the gear and had fish on the deck we had to separate the fish we were going to ice down the hatch and the dogfish that we would liver. Sole usually went down round but Ling Cod was dressed. So there was a fair amount of gutting to be done. Handling the fish on the deck would sometimes take all the time there was between setting the gear. Other times you might have a half hour to relax between sets.

We'd put in long hours, sometimes leaving our anchorage at three thirty in the morning to get out to the grounds and not getting back till eleven at night. We'd anchor in port for the night where today's draggers often fish right through the night.

The only thing that we suffered from there was a lack of anything to drink, something you particularly missed any time there was a dance in Skidegate. There was usually something to drink to be had at the dances because the local people, both Indian and whites, made their own home brew. We found it a pretty fair product, very invigorating. The dances wouldn't have been half so lively without that.
Anyway, we fished around the Charlottes for about six weeks and then learned from one of the Shannon brothers, who had organized this pool of four boats we were part of, that we were entitled to only a half share rather than a full share. We said that we wouldn't fish under that deal and that we'd make our own arrangements for any fish we caught from then on. An outfit over in Prince Rupert, Northern Fish and Cold Storage, were sending packers to other vessels that were fishing beside us so we delivered our catch to them for the balance of the trip. But we had already delivered quite a bit of fish into this pool, which had been picked up by the Canadian Fish company.

When we came back to Vancouver we found that Canadian Fish had cut our price a quarter of a cent off the agreed rate. That may sound like nothing today but we had delivered something close to a hundred and thirty thousand pounds of sole to them and it was quite a loss to us. It amounted to something like eighty to ninety dollars loss for each of us, which was two weeks of our earnings. As skipper I refused to sign the settlement. It was my first experience of that because previously Frank Radoslovich had dealt with the company.

I went down to the U.F.F.U.(United Fishermen's Federal Union) hall, which by then I was a member of as a gillnet fisherman, and I remember being amazed to find that we didn't have a share agreement with Canadian Fish in writing. That it was nothing more than a 'gentlemen's agreement' about how the trip should be shared.

I talked to Bill Burgess, the secretary-treasurer of the U.F.F.U., which didn't yet have any draggers organized, about this price cut by Canadian Fish. "Well Homer, we just don't have a price agreement with them for flat fish. You guys should have come to us first and we could have gotten something in writing. But as it is, there isn't a thing we can do." It was the kind of grievance that we should have known enough about to know what to do. But we didn't.

Actually, the dragging I've been talking about is what we did only during one half of the year. It was what emerged out of my gillnetting in the summer and fall that came to determine what I would be doing for the better part of my adult life. At the time I wouldn't have been able to predict that I would become a full time union officer. I've more than once wondered how differently my life might have turned out by making some fairly minor decision at that stage in my life, such as getting into dragging year round up north. I don't think it would have fundamentally changed who I am. But you often can't tell what the consequences of some decisions will be.
5.

ONE BIG UNION IN FISH

The Appeal for Unity

How I first got involved in union work has a beginning before I actually became a member of the United Fishermen. It stemmed from events which directly effected me and most other salmon fishermen on the Fraser.

In 1941 the minimum price for Pinks was something like seven and a half cents a fish but when the season opened the companies started by paying ten cents and then raised the price to thirteen cents. However, as the main run came in they kept cutting the price back till they got it down to just above the minimum price. There was a lot of angry debate about that among fishermen and in the course of that I began to find out more about the United Fishermen's Federal Union.

I was then a member of the British Columbia Fishermen's Protective Association but it generated very little involvement on the part of its members. I got the gist of the turmoil going on through talking with my older brother and uncles. The following spring my uncle John said, "One of these days soon I'm going to have to take you down to a meeting of the United Fishermen's Union in Vancouver. It's run by a bunch of Reds but they're pretty good people."

The thing that struck me at the first convention of the U.F.F.U. I attended was that they had an organized program. They were discussing the coming contract negotiations and the new fishery regulations which were coming into effect. There were reports from the Vancouver Labour Council and from the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada and some discussion having to do with the war effort on the agenda. I wasn't a member yet but I decided that was the kind of organization I wanted to belong to. This thing, the United Fishermen, looked like it was going places.

One of the major topics at the convention was the issue of broadening the U.F.F.U. and developing the process of amalgamation of the various fishermen's organizations. There was still no one organization tying everything together in the industry.

There were just so many divisions and little organizations - based upon area and type of gear or the historical background of past splits - that it seemed like a hopeless mess until the drive for unity began to go forward. The Salmon Purse Seiners Union had already merged with the United Federal Fishermen's Union by 1942. Members of the Pacific Coast Fishermen's Union, which represented a group of trollers and some gillnetters, were also beginning to come over into the U.F.F.U. They were from the Vancouver area but also had some organization over on Vancouver Island and up in Sointula and in Alert Bay and further up the coast.

There had already been organizational meetings out in Delta where Scotty Neish from Victoria and Gus Cogswell and others had come and talked about unity among fishermen. They argued that there would be no way forward for fishermen unless we had one big union organization in the industry. But that hadn't gotten off the ground yet in Delta.
After I joined the U.F.F.U. I realized that there only were about five members in the Ladner area - my uncle John, my older brother, Swerrie Varhaugh, one other guy and myself.

We started to sign up fishermen who, like ourselves, were fed up with the B.C.F.P.A., as well as others who hadn't been members of any fishermen's organization. We'd signed up only another half dozen members when, in the late summer of 1942, right in the middle of the sockeye run, the companies decided to slash prices. The canneries declared a shut-down for a couple of days because of an oversupply of fish. When they reopened the next Monday morning we found that instead of getting the thirteen and a half cents a pound, which was the minimum price agreement that year, we would be fishing for ten cents a pound. That was a big slice of our earnings.

There was a big seine fleet fishing in the Gulf of Georgia at the time. The seiners were already mainly organized and the whole fleet went on strike following the announcement of the price cut. The strike was called under the leadership of the United Fishermen's Federal Union but when it took place it was solid. Fishermen were just enraged. Pretty well everyone joined the strike, gillnetters and seiners, regardless of whether they were union members or not. Although many gillnetters still belonged to the B.C.F.P.A. there were hardly any fishermen who broke ranks.

You have to remember that this strike had been called despite the general wartime 'no strike' policy of virtually all unions. The government could enforce a ban on any strike through the powers of various wartime regulations. I'm sure the companies took that into consideration when they made their decision to slash fish prices. Although it was the companies who had violated the contract the pressure was on the union, especially the leadership, to settle the strike. "Undercutting the war effort" was a line that was used throughout those years to oppose any labor action of any kind that arose.

The U.F.F.U. called an open meeting on the issue of the strike and got representatives of various other unions to attend. They invited the companies to send their own representative to be heard, which they did. The meeting was held in one of the big halls in Vancouver and was packed to the rafters with fishermen. In the course of that meeting the officers of the U.F.F.U. proposed that for the duration of the strike the fishermen would fish for nothing, in aid of the war effort, if the canners would agree to can the fish for nothing. Of course the companies weren't going to operate without making a profit but when they refused that proposal it undercut their line about the strike harming the war effort and all that.

However, shortly afterwards the union leadership made a move which did result, effectively, in losing the strike. That came about when the union decided to release those boats which wanted to fish other species of salmon providing that they didn't fish on the Fraser or in the adjoining waters. So the bulk of the seine fleet and some gillnetters left to fish in Johnstone Strait and further north. Away they went to fish Chum and cohoé. That left the local Fraser gillnet fleet sitting here fighting a strike against a cannery price cut while the balance of the fleet was engaged in fishing - making money for themselves and
also providing fish for the companies we were on strike against. The result was that we ended up going back to fish for the ten cents a pound the canners had cut the price to.

There were some fishermen who were so disgusted that they threw their union books in and said "What the hell is this?", that they weren't going to belong to a union which acted that way. It took a lot of explaining but over the longer haul we turned that response around. Not myself so much as a lot of other union members. They pointed out that it was the companies that had cut the prices to start with and then had brought every conceivable kind of pressure on the union leadership to force a concession. Despite even that serious mistake there was still a strong feeling for the union amongst fishermen.

We got into another dust-up over that kind of price cutting the following year. In 1943 the Price Control Board in Ottawa announced there was going to be a price ceiling of thirteen and a half cents a pound for landed sockeye salmon where in the previous year that had been the minimum price, and had sold for up to seventeen cents. So fishermen went on strike again and we won. The strike only lasted about three or four days.

You would have thought that the government and the wartime Price Control Board would have come down on us. Especially since we were about the only group bucking the Control Board decisions. While the government had the power to do just about anything under the various war time laws they couldn't catch fish with regulations and they didn't want to unnecessarily antagonize fishermen. The deal they had given us was so rank that we didn't have much in the way of bad publicity on that strike. The government found that it had overstepped itself and backed off. The strike gained the union a great deal of further support among fishermen and we signed up a lot of new members.

My first organizing work involved trying to sign up members into the local we had established in Ladner. There's always a question of personalities involved in organizing on the local level. For instance, I knew Ed Wardroper as a fisherman, an independent minded guy who just loved an argument. He'd be in arguments with my father and others on just about any topic. I signed him up in our local when it first got started. He didn't have any objections to joining the union but his view was that it would never come to anything; that fishermen were too individualistic to come together in a union that would ever mean anything. But if we were going to join he'd throw his lot in with us.

Ed was certainly an example of the stubbornness you find amongst some fishermen. I remember one incident that had to do with our union stickers which had to be stuck on the inside of the glass in the cabin. Ed's sticker was laying by the compass and when I came by one day I said, "For crying out loud Ed, put your sticker up. We're building a local here and the more stickers we can show the better."

"Ah, I don't believe in that. If people want to join then you shouldn't have to advertise to get them into the union. I don't need stickers on my boat to show that I'm in the union," he answers.

So we argued a bit about it. "You're just too lazy to put them up," I said and grabbed the stickers, wet them and was about to stick them up in the wheelhouse.

He got really angry at that, tore them out of my hand, ripped them up and threw them overboard. So we had another argument over that.
It sounds like a silly argument? Well, it was silly. It is the thing that would happen between a teenager, which I still was, being a few months short of twenty, and a grown man. Probably that was part of what the argument was about - me trying to tell a grown man like him what he had to do. But he could be stubborn on other matters too, like refusing to see a doctor after he got badly tangled up with the tail shaft of his boat.

In January or February of 1943 we got a charter for a local of the United Fishermen's Federal Union here in Ladner. I was elected as secretary of the local and sent, along with two others, as a delegate to the upcoming convention of the U.F.F.U. It was the first union convention that I'd attended as a delegate and it came as quite a surprise to me when I was nominated for the General Executive Board. I wasn't all that anxious to stand for anything else. Being the secretary of our local seemed enough in one bite to me.

But I was persuaded to let my name stand for the General Executive Board at the convention. I wasn't quite twenty when I was elected to the Board and thought it was a pretty big chunk to chew on. Although in doing the work I rapidly caught on and learned a lot in the process and was able to speak my piece about the practical problems of organization, especially among gillnet fishermen.

The General Executive Board seemed reasonably well balanced in regards to having people representing the various regions and gear interests. It was somewhat weighted to the southern regions of the coast because we didn't have much organization in the north yet. But the Board had a fairly good balance of seineboat men and gillnet fishermen, halibut fishermen and some trollers. We had delegates from all those sectors of the industry. Not all nor even the majority of fishermen in all those fleets were in the U.F.F.U. but there were some from each sector.

In a number of places where I went to talk to fishermen about organization the attitude was, "What union is it now?" I'd say "We're for forming one big union in the fishing industry and the United Fishermen's Federal Union seems to be the agency to do it. They're prepared to bring everybody in the industry into one organization rather than having us split up."

That was an idea which had been around for a long time but had never been achieved. It was very much on fishermen's minds then. You didn't have to persuade people too much. It seemed they'd had their fill of small restricted associations and I don't think we would have made as much headway, as fast as we did, if we had gone for a separate seineboat or gillnet union. Putting forward the issue of unity among fishermen in the industry seemed to be a decisive factor in bringing people over to us.

The Bases of Division
It's true, some fishermen, especially the smallboat fishermen, had arguments against joining together all the different sectors of the industry in one union. And they were strong arguments. Mainly it was the fear of the smallboat fisherman that they were going to be completely dominated by the seiners. By 'domination' they meant, or feared, that without an independent voice as gillnetters or trollers, those involved in seining would open up almost all areas on the coast to seine fishing. They feared that seiners would be
fishing competitively with gillnetters in all places and at all times. That would make it impossible to make a living by gillnetting.

Considering that the seine is by far the most efficient method of catching salmon, there is a conflict of interest between gillnetters and seiners.

For example, on the Fraser; if seiners were allowed to operate extensively around the mouth or nearby they would pretty well wipe out the possibility of gillnetters earning a living. It's something that's of central concern in the Federal fishery regulations and has gone to Royal Commissions more than once. In the Royal Commission of 1942, presided over by Justice Gordon Sloan, a ruling was established which drew a line through the Gulf of Georgia, east of which the seiners couldn't fish. Another case would be Rivers and Smith's Inlets which are primarily gillnet areas and are closed to seiners except for a part of the Chum season. There are sections of the coast listed by area where seiners aren't allowed to operate as extensively as the do elsewhere.

They didn't come to those decisions easily or without a lot of lobbying. There were constant briefs and arguments, the gillnetters taking up the cudgels on one side and the seiners on the other. That was one of the biggest stumbling blocks to unity among fishermen; the fear of small boat fishermen that in going into an organization incorporating seineboat men the union would be dominated by the seiners and the gillnetters livelihood would eventually be lost.

Fishermen had a long history of engaging in political lobbying for issues that effected their livelihood and Members of Parliament had been playing that game pretty well. Tom Reid, the Member of Parliament for New Westminster riding, which then took in Delta and Richmond, made a great pretence about being 'The friend of the gillnetter' and supposedly looking after their interests in parliament. I just give him as an example; in other places other M.P.s took a different position, depending upon whom they considered most inclined to support them for re-election.

There was another argument which came up among gillnet men too. That was that the seineboat fishermen went on strike for issues which had nothing to do with the gillnetters. For instance, conflicts over crew shares. Or the feeling that the seiners might be willing to put up a hard fight on issues which, beyond a point, gillnetters might not want to fight for. For instance, strikes over the prices for pinks and chums. Gillnetters made more of their earnings with sockeye while Pinks or Chum were crucial for the seine fleet.

Seiners had some comparable arguments. You heard the argument, "We don't want to be in a union along with gillnetters because they'll try to have us excluded from fishing in further areas of the coast or restricted in the gear we can use" and so forth. But I don't recall anywhere near as much argument against a single union in the fishing industry from seineboat men as I did from gillnetters.

You were looking at people's fears about the loss of their livelihood. That was what was involved in this history of endless political lobbying about aspects of the Fisheries regulations. That was what the divisions and antagonism between fishermen by gear and fishing area were all about. In attempting to create a united fishermen's union you had to deal with that seriously.
The animosities between fishermen using different gear in some areas could be pretty damn high. You'd talk to the same person time and again over a period of weeks or months, trying to drive home the fact that there was no way they could influence the government split up as they were. Trying to convince them that fishermen had to get into one organization and come to some sort of agreement among ourselves: and then act together when pressuring the government on issues that effected us.

There were other things that were happening too - arguments going on amongst fishermen and among sections of the union membership. In 1944 one of the biggest issues was what was going to happen when the war ended and the Japanese-Canadians returned to the coast. There were some really vicious arguments going on about that. Some fishermen said, "We should make damn sure that they never come back." But others, those who were more politically conscious, were saying that Japanese-Canadians had a right to come back into the industry and that if fishermen tried to exclude them it would play right into the hands of the canners. The argument raged back and forth between 1944 and 1946 and even later in some places.

The original Fish Cannery Workers Union set up in the thirties did have some success in bringing Chinese cannery workers into the union, from what I've been told. There was never any significant objection to that as far as I ever saw. There also had been some effort, in earlier years, to bring Japanese-Canadian fishermen into a united fishermen's union. But there had been set-backs and divisions, before my time, where the companies had been able to use the Japanese fishermen to break strikes. That was part of the reaction against them.

And don't forget, during the period I'm talking about the war was still on or was just recently over. That was part of the hostility toward anyone of Japanese extraction. That's the latent racism which war always tends to bring out.

But the real economic basis of this antagonism was that here was a group of skilled fishermen who other fishermen feared were going to come back into the industry and possibly take away their livelihood. Even though many fishermen wouldn't admit it they were trying to keep the Japanese-Canadian fishermen out because they were competition. Instead they'd bring up every other argument under the sun.

That debate was taking place during the existence of the United Fishermen's Federal Union and carried on into the formation of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. You could clearly see the economic basis of these racial arguments against the Japanese fishermen. I don't recall anything like that being directed against Chinese cannery workers, even though in the broader society they were discriminated against too. That Japanese exclusion sentiment was found mainly amongst certain groups of fishermen, it didn't prevail amongst shoreworkers. Since the time the shoreworkers merged with the fishermen to form the UFAWU I've never heard a shoreworker get up at a convention and raise the kinds of issues or make the sorts of racial statements that some fishermen did then.

Maybe one shouldn't overstress it. Because there were a lot of locals where that exclusion issue had been chewed over and a sound policy adopted by the majority of the
membership. The problem seemed most prevalent in certain gillnet locals who had been in direct competition with Japanese fishermen, although it effected some mixed locals too. It took endless discussions to push through the union's policy against exclusion.

At one point I and some other delegates who were members of the C.C.F. lobbied to bring in a professor Black as a speaker to the annual convention. This Black was active in what you could call the civil rights movement of the time. The convention agreed that he'd be given time to address the delegates but unfortunately he launched into an educational tirade, kind of talking down to our membership. That didn't impress anyone, including those of us who'd brought him in. It may even have been counter productive.

Nevertheless, at the convention level we always wound up with a pretty positive policy - that is to say a position against exclusion and for equality of rights for all those engaged in the industry. Resolutions to bring everybody in the industry into the union so we'd have bargaining power. But a lot of the arguments which we beat back at the convention level would continue on in the fishermen's home locals - over whether they agreed with what that 'god damn convention had decided'.

I recall one occasion after a convention where we'd again passed a resolution against any kind of discrimination among workers in the industry. A counter resolution opposing the officers of the union on that issue had been defeated and I was reporting this back to the Ladner local. One of our local members got up and said, "I'd made up my mind a long time ago that when the first Jap got back into the fishing industry I was going to take my rifle and shoot him. But I've changed my mind. When the first one of them comes back I'm coming over and shoot you." Meaning me. And he threw his union book on the table and stormed out of the hall.

So there were all the problems of trying to get the different types of gear into one union, and keep them together, as well as this problem of the division by race. That carried on into the late forties, though it was worst of all just after the war.

I was pretty sure that the companies were planning on the Japanese fishermen coming back to the industry. And they did what they could to set the scene in advance, to create as much antagonism among fishermen as possible. I think they figured that when the Japanese did come back they would be pushed into a separate organization which would be dominated by the packing companies.

Some groups of Indian fishermen, particularly in the north, got into this exclusion debate and lobbied long and hard to keep the Japanese out of the industry. That was the position taken by some of those I consider to be the misleaders of the Native fishermen. They painted the return of the Japanese as the only important issue on the Skeena.

There is a long history of those antagonisms and divisions and the companies played them for all they were worth. If you went to most of the Canneries and fish camps up the coast then you found that everyone lived in their own separate enclaves. Even the net racks were separated. Those racial divisions are a valuable weapon in holding back union organization.

I know it's something that's been around for a long time. But it always appeared to me to be a sad contradiction; to see Indians who had been and were being exploited and
discriminated against, turn and vent their spleen against the Japanese fishermen. It may not be so unusual in the world but when you come up against it and realize how it's used, its a sorry thing.
6.

AN ORGANIZER'S APPRENTICESHIP

Strands in the Skein

There were about four or five things that I was involved in all at the same time. Alongside my work in the union I was engaged in setting up the Fisherman's Hall in Ladner and was getting interested in Fishermen's Co-ops. I was active with the C.C.F. organization here and somewhat later got involved in helping form the first local Credit Union. I was secretary of our union local and a member of the General Executive Board of the UFAWU. That was all in addition to working on the dragger during the winter and gillnet fishing in the summer and fall.

I now don't know how I managed to keep it all up. I do remember that it sure seemed to take up a heck of a lot of my life. I enjoyed it in some ways and I was enthusiastic about doing organizational work. I felt that we were beginning to see some results in terms of organizing a union that was strong enough to take on the companies. But at the same time I had the feeling that there were so many problems I should have an answer to. Although I may not have shown it I sometimes felt beyond my depth.

I had mixed feelings at times. 'Yeah we're going great guns. But it's more than I want to do at the age of twenty. I've got other ideas for my spare time'. Sometimes I really didn't want to do all these things even if they were important. I'd wonder, 'Why isn't somebody else taking on more of this or that part of the load?'

We had a good team of about a half dozen fishermen in our local, guys who would travel around helping out with organizational work over in Steveston and further up the valley. There were times when I had to attend some meeting but was trying to do some work on my nets, work that had to be done. Some of these guys in our local would say, "Alright, you go and represent us at the meeting and we'll see to it that your net's mended". And they did. So that made it a bit easier.

I had been elected as president of the Fraser River District Council shortly after it was formed. The Council took in seven or eight locals starting at the mouth of the river and going up to Albion. There was a local at Steveston, my own local in Ladner and another one at Woodward's Landing made up largely of Finnish fishermen. There was a local at Sunbury and another at Annieville and above that others at Port Mann, Port Kells and Albion. Those were all distinct and separate communities in those days and it meant a lot of traveling. There seemed to be something brewing all the time between the actual fishing seasons - there was always some meeting that I had to attend.

Just about every kind of issue related to the fishing industry came up. General issues and local ones. For instance, in my own local we spent a lot of time discussing the number of days open to fishing on the Fraser. There was a local at Steveston, my own local in Ladner and another one at Woodward's Landing made up largely of Finnish fishermen. There was a local at Sunbury and another at Annieville and above that others at Port Mann, Port Kells and Albion. Those were all distinct and separate communities in those days and it meant a lot of traveling. There seemed to be something brewing all the time between the actual fishing seasons - there was always some meeting that I had to attend.

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Just about every kind of issue related to the fishing industry came up. General issues and local ones. For instance, in my own local we spent a lot of time discussing the number of days open to fishing on the Fraser. We were concerned that the salmon runs were being overfished. The question arose whether enough time was allowed during closure for the fish to get through the commercial fishery on the Fraser. With fishing five days a week the salmon that got by us on the lower end of the river during the two day
closure hadn't gotten past Mission bridge yet by the time fishing started again. So the concern was that not enough fish were being left to escape for spawning purposes. After considerable debate we recommended that there be a four day fishing week with three days closure, to allow for a better escapement of the salmon stocks.

Every local had particular issues which had practical application for fishing in that area itself - getting aides to navigation and things of that kind. For instance, we might want to get the government snag puller sent down to pull snags out of our stretch of the river. Or we wanted a navigational light established where none existed. Our local lobbied for years to get the light buoy that you now find at the entrance to Canoe Pass at the mouth of the river.

It was mainly Federal government agencies we would lobby for those improvements but it might be the necessary to put pressure on municipal councils too. That was the case here in Ladner when we had to push the municipality to get the government to reinforce the dykes, because a lot of fishermen's docks and property were being washed away.

Actually, I had no intention of doing full time organizing work for the union. I was perfectly happy to continue earning my living as a fisherman and putting in as much time as I could helping to organize. I had been approached several times by officers of the union to take on an organizing job but had turned them down. Basically it was that I didn't want to be engaged in 'shore work', as I saw it.

At the time I was also active in the fishermen's co-op movement and had been elected to the Board of Directors of the Fishermen's Co-Op Federation. It loosely coordinated the Kyuquot Trollers Co-Op, the United Fishermen's Co-Op, the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-Op and a smaller group at Sointula. The Federation had been talking about hiring someone who would work as an organizer and go into places where they had members but no local organization. The job was to find out the problems these members were having and to rectify them if possible.

The Fishermen's Co-op Federation executive persuaded me to consider that job which was to begin in 1946. But because of financial problems and disagreements they finally decided that no such appointment would be made.

In the meantime word had gotten back to officers of the union that I had been considering this job with the Co-ops. They called me in one day and said "What's going on here? We've been after you to take on a full time organizing job with the union and you've been saying you want to keep on fishing. Now we understand that you're ready to work for the Co-Ops." So I found myself in an impossible situation.

**Practicum**

I took the job as full time organizer for the UFAWU and started in April of 1946. The title was Fraser District Organizer which meant that my main work was supposed to be among the Fraser River locals, most of whom were gillnetters. But because of the shortage of staff there was no possibility that my work would be confined to that. During the first year I got involved in helping to organize the halibut fishermen, went around with Fred Olsen starting up the Gulf Council and helped getting shoreworkers organized in the
Millard plant. But when the salmon season got going in full force I was back to my main job, which was organizing gillnet fishermen along the Fraser.

The first job I was given was to go out and organize among the halibut fishermen in Vancouver and New Westminster, who were starting to rig their gear in preparation for their year. I'd never fished halibut myself so I was a little shy about the idea, knowing that halibut fishermen had their own practices and skills. Some of them also seined or did other types of fishing as well but most considered themselves to be long line halibut fishermen. There was a good deal of craft pride in that. On top of that, I was a dragger man - who halibut fishermen had no use for. So I wasn't fussy about the task.

I went to the halibut section in the union and raised the point that I didn't know many halibut fishermen personally so it would be pretty difficult to do the job. The section agreed that it would be a problem and they appointed a fellow by the name of Bjarne Kaasen to take me around and introduce me. The work of preparing the gear was being done in a host of warehouses and lofts and private quarters scattered all along the Vancouver and New Westminster waterfront. Barney spent the better part of five weeks taking me around. He knew every halibut fishermen and they all knew Barney.

I got a kind of kick out of it - we'd cover the waterfront in Vancouver by foot or by streetcar because neither of us nor the union had a car to use at that time. At about two thirty in the afternoon all gear rigging pretty well came to a halt and everybody headed up to the nearest beer parlour. So at around that time of the day Barney would get thirsty and he'd say, "Well, come on. It's time to go for a beer". We'd head into the Patricia hotel and there would be the halibut fishermen, including many of those we hadn't been able to meet yet.

There was a chance to do some organizing in the beer parlour, though it wasn't the best place for it. You would end up sitting at one table arguing over some particular incident that had happened in the previous season or years earlier, or just reminiscing about halibut fishing in general. So even if it was a good social atmosphere you usually weren't accomplishing much in the way of organizing.

However, in that year we did get started with the halibut clearance program, where each halibut boat elected its own union delegate. His responsibility was to see to it that every member of the crew was a member of the union before they sailed. The smallest halibut boats had a crew of five but more usually six or seven men while the large halibut schooners had as many as ten men aboard.

The boat delegate's responsibility was to bring the union contract aboard and see that it was enforced during the season. Some of these boats would be gone for a month or six weeks on a single voyage if they were going to fish off the coast of Alaska. In some cases they might make double headers or even triple headers, unloading their catch in Sitka or Ketchikan and going out to fish again before returning home. So they would be out for three months and things could get pretty hairy. It's necessary to have some form of organization aboard each boat in situations like that.

Not long after that I got involved in helping to set up the Gulf Council. That was composed of fishermen who were engaged in handlining Ling Cod, although many of
them did salmon trolling as well. There were locals and small groups of our members scattered all through the Gulf Islands and around the Gulf of Georgia. There was a local at Nanaimo and another one at Sidney. There were locals over in Gibson's Landing and a group at Manson's Landing and Pender Harbour. There was a group of our members at Yuculta Narrows and others at Powell River, Owen Bay and Herriot Bay, at Quathiaski Cove and more.

I was asked to go along with a fellow by the name of Fred Olsen who lived at Yuculta. He had been a cod fisherman but now worked full time for the union as an organizer. My job was to try to set up a Gulf Council of all these little groups as well as bring in new members.

It was an interesting period of my life because I went into new communities and met people I had never known before. I travelled a lot with Fred, who was a very flamboyant type, a very interesting guy in many respects. Well read too. He'd been a policeman in New Westminster during the longshore strike in the mid thirties when the police were sent down to the docks to club workers on the picket line. He refused to do that and after a few other run-ins with his superiors he turned in his badge. Fred eventually settled at Big Bay, near Yuculta, and fished for a living there.

When Fred got into his home bailiwick, which seemed to consist of near everywhere in the Gulf, he knew people in every place. Fred was very attentive to business during the day but by his lights the day really only started at around ten at night. That's when the real socializing got going. It revolved around him getting people to sit down with him to have a drink while he expounded his theories about organization and what the future society would be like, the change from capitalism to socialism and such. That's where his flamboyance emerged.

There was a lot of moonshine being brewed in all these different little communities. I can remember getting some wild rides in the middle of the night in small boats, across Yuculta Narrows. Coming and going into these little pockets of settlement and often just knowing the general direction we were travelling in.

Before I was hired as an organizer for the union my work was mainly restricted to gillnet fishermen on the Fraser. That continued as my main job. In 1946 the union was still growing and the biggest task was still organizational work. So I spent a lot of time prior to the salmon season going around, float to float, man to man, talking about being in the union, signing people up and collecting dues from those who were already members.

I remember going around time and time again to some fishermen and going over their grievances about unions they had belonged to in the past or their qualms about joining the UFAWU. It got so that you had heard most of the reactions and worked out answers to them. Where I couldn't answer their questions I'd contact somebody at the union office and raise with them the questions the fishermen were raising with me. Then I'd get back to the fishermen with their answers.

As to some of the specifics. In the Steveston area, I'd try to establish a little committee at each fish camp as soon as the fishermen began to work on their gear, before the fishing season began. There used to be a string of fish camps and floats and net lofts all
along the river there. There was Atlas camp and Delta camp, Gulf and Phoenix camps and many more. Once a few men were organized in each camp I'd get them together with committees from the other camps to discuss any problems in organizing. I'd go from camp to camp and talk to the committee in each. They'd usually have a few people lined up who were just about ready to sign up but who'd need just a little more talking to. So I'd go down and see them. You wouldn't get all of them but you'd get a few. That arrangement worked quite well.

It's kind of hard now to remember exactly what I'd say and what some of the come backs were then. After a while it tends to all run together. It's hard to sort out one case from the others. But at times it boiled down to individuals who weren't objecting to anything in the union except that it was going to cost them some money. That was a minority of fishermen, to be sure, but some figured, "Let the other guys pay for the union work". You could deal with all their different arguments but in the end they'd still say, "I'll see you later."

There is one case from that first year which sticks in my mind. Fred Olsen and I were going from boat to boat; he'd cover one boat and I'd cover the next. I was talking to a fisherman who was in the union and then stepped over to a boat that was tied alongside him. The door to the cabin was slightly ajar and I tapped on it. "Anybody here?"

A voice said "Come in."

I shoved the door open and there is a guy I'd never met before lying on his bunk. "I'm here on behalf of the United Fishermen's and Allied Workers Union doing a bit of organizing."

That was about all I got out when he came leaping out of his bunk screaming, telling me to get the hell off his boat or he'd kick my can around. I was pretty hot blooded myself and I was about to get into an altercation with him.

I enjoyed a good argument and never lost my cool in one, regardless if I was winning or losing. Where I could get hot was where somebody started to insult me even before he knew what I was going to say or when someone threatened me. Then I could get pretty hot.

But Fred was right over there. He wasn't waiting to hear the rest of it. "Come on Homer, let's get off his boat."

"What the hell? We don't have to put up with that kind of treatment. Why the hell did you let him to run us off?" I said to him afterwards.

"He's a madman, I recognize the type. You wouldn't sign him up in a thousand years. You're just going to get into a fight and waste your time to no purpose," Fred said. It was good advice.

Over the years I didn't find too many situations like that unless guys had been drinking. If a lot of boozing was going on you could expect just about anything. Fights can break out over anything, over nothing. But it was very seldom you got into situations like that.

I also remember a fisherman who I'd seen around Steveston who I'd always thought was in the union. I came along when he was working on his boat one day and said, "By the way, have you paid your dues yet for the year?"
"No", he says. "And I don't intend too."

"Oh? What's the problem?" I says.

Well, he started in on what had happened in 1942, which showed him that there was no future in having a fishermen's union of any kind. I argued with him and he finally ran out of steam on that only to switch into the argument of seiners versus gillnetters, that he didn't think they should be in the same union. We pursued that for a while. I can't remember all the arguments he raised but they all dovetailed into him being anti-union.

Eventually I got fed up with this and made some remark like "You're just a god damn company mouthpiece".

He turned to me and said, "You may think you know a lot but you're not going to organize people if you go around insulting them. I'm not a company stooge and those are my opinions."

Two or three years later he did join the union and was a fairly good member. By that time I had come to realize that what he'd said was right, in a sense. That while he was responding to a host of issues with the company line he wasn't a 'company man' And to insult him, as I had, would in no way convince him.

One of the things I very much wanted to do, over the years, was to organize the draggers. They were centered on a group of boats operating from the Campbell Avenue docks. None of the boats were organized in any trade union sense. Their crews didn't have a signed share agreement with the owners and the boats didn't have a minimum price agreement with the fish buyers. The Campbell Avenue draggers however had an arrangement with the buyers where they had the first call on the local market. So the vessels which came into the trawl fishery during the winter months had a quite restricted market. There was an animus between the two groups.

My feeling was that we should be able to resolve that division by getting everybody into the union and working out whatever our differences were there. I was enthusiastic about trying to organize the draggers and we did manage to get a majority of the crews on the majority of the boats into the union - initially. Although I was quite aware of the difference of viewpoint between year-round draggers and those engaged in dragging only during the winter it didn't occur to me that it would be almost two decades before we had the trawl fleet solidly organized.

In any case, by late 1946 the fish companies had started slashing prices. The union made representation to the Price Control Board, which was still in operation and which was supposed to stabilize prices in the post-war period. But they turned aside all our representations. The fish buyers cut the price of Ling Cod in half, from twelve to six cents a pound.

We set a deadline for strike action to correspond with the opening of the Ling Cod season in March of 1947. We were going to tie up the whole fresh fish supply, which meant that any long liners involved in that fishery were being asked to join forces with us. But it would primarily be led by the trawlers and the handline boats.

Unfortunately, the trawl fleet had in it some impatient people who decided that they were going to shut her down at the beginning of February. These trawlers fished year-
round and they had already suffered the price cuts and didn't feel there was any point in holding back on the strike. They couldn't see the strategy of waiting until all groups would hit the bricks at the same time. There's more than one occasion when fishermen have decided that they were going to take action regardless of what strategy the officers of the union held was most effective.

I talked to dragger crews on the waterfront till I was blue in the face and tried to persuade them they were making a mistake to go out then. Sometimes it's possible to hold the thing in check and take action when it would be best suited to their interests. At other times it isn't. They were fed up with what had happened and they were going to carry the strike through.

Using the strike weapon is a two-edged sword, no doubt about that. But if you can time it so it brings the maximum pressure on the company you've got a better chance coming out with some gains. Timing is a very important factor in the fishing industry. If certain runs of fish are coming in it is pressing on fishermen that they either tie the thing to the wall or, at other times, that they've simply got to stack it up for the balance of the season.

Anyway, they tied the trawl fleet up three or four weeks before the handline season started. But by the time the handliners were on strike for a couple of weeks a lot of the trawlers were beginning to weaken in their resolve to see it through.

We had a meeting of the trawler crews who were members of the union and a few times we even invited those who weren't members to sit down with us and discuss developments in the strike. That wasn't the smartest thing either. I remember one such meeting when a bunch of people led by a fellow called Jimmy Pope walked out and made it appear that they were going to go out fishing right then, although they didn't actually do it.

From a situation where it appeared we had an all encompassing unity, with the vessel owners and everybody in agreement to fight the price cuts, there was now a move by the vessel owners and some of the crewmen to go out fishing. The split was so bad, with the imminent threat of a big chunk of the trawl fleet moving, that the strike by the trawlers had to be called off. Everyone had to go back without winning any improvement against the price cuts.

Once the trawlers decided to call off the strike there was the question of what the handline fishermen were going to do. There was a real bitterness amongst the handline fishermen when that happened. They felt they'd been betrayed by the trawlers. The handliners carried on till about the last week of March when the matter was put to the union's annual convention. Not that the convention could decide that because it was written into the constitution that it was up to the membership of each particular local or section whether they called off a strike or not. But the convention recommendation would carry a lot of weight.

Fred Olsen, the organizer primarily involved with the handliners, couldn't see how they could win no matter how long they stayed on strike. As long as the trawlers were landing Ling Cod in quantity it would be impossible for the handliners to win. It was a very intense and bitter debate. Some of the fishermen decided that they weren't going to fish Ling Cod again until they got their twelve cents a pound.
There was a certain amount of disintegration among the Gulf locals; few locals disintegrated and some smaller ones amalgamated with others. Today, I don't think there is any live Ling Cod being landed in Vancouver. None that are transported live in the holds of boats, as they once were, and brought in to the fresh fish market here. What Ling Cod there is is brought in by the draggers.

The Shoreworkers

There had been a pretty close working relationship between the shoreworkers and the U.F.F.U even prior to 1945 when the United Fishermen's Federal Union merged with the Fish Cannery Workers union to become the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. While it's true that there were family ties between some fishermen and shoreworkers I don't think that played a major role in the issue of union amalgamation. The discussion was based on quite specific reasons in favor of a merger as opposed to the arguments of those who wanted an exclusively fishermen's union.

I suppose it's inevitable in the way the industry is structured that there are going to be some fishermen who are inclined to believe what the company representatives tell them about the dangers of being part of an organization that includes shoreworkers. That the shoreworkers were going to outvote them or tie them up over issues which mainly don't concern fishermen.

Our argument in 1945 was that the union's strength depended upon our being able to shut down the plants and that if the fishermen and shoreworkers amalgamated it would be a hell of a lot better than if they were in separate organizations, possibly at odds with each other. The merger was a big step forward. Both the shoreworkers and the fishermen have gained by it. Sometimes when the going gets roughest one group or the other can help carry things through. There are strains in an organization, such as the UFAWU, which includes most of the sectional interests within the industry. But those stresses would be a lot worse if they were crystalized in separate unions. The very fact that we can get together in a convention every year and thrash out a lot of the problems makes it possible to stick together the rest of the time.

There was determination to have a balance of shoreworkers and fishermen in the General Executive Board of the union. Eventually that was written into the constitution, so there is a certain percentage of the Board that had to be made up of shoreworkers and tendermen and fishermen. That was intended to make all sectors feel they have an assured voice in the running of the union.

Historically, I think that there were as many as eighty canneries operating along the coast at one time. That was before my time, but there were probably two dozen canneries still operating when I first started as an organizer. Some of them were fairly small but there were some good-sized canneries at place like Goose Bay in River Inlet. Today people don't even know where Goose Bay is. The process of cannery consolidation and centralization that later emerged had a tremendous impact along the coast - stripped it of industry in some areas.
In 1946 we had contracts covering the skilled trades in virtually all the canneries, and in most places we had contracts covering the regular crews too. But fish canning is a seasonal industry where practically everybody is laid off at the end of the season, so organization was patchy. There was always a big influx of people who came and went. The seniority system in rehiring was still very lax and sometimes nonexistent.

The Imperial cannery in Steveston, the major B.C. Packers plant in the region, had already been organized by 1945. The Canadian Fish plant, down at the foot of Gore in Vancouver, and the Gulf of Georgia cannery in Steveston, had been organized earlier. Millard's plant over in North Vancouver was being organized in 1946. But there was still a lot of organizational work that had to be done in canneries up the coast.

During the first year I was a full time organizer one of the jobs given to me was to help organize the fresh fish plant attached to the Imperial cannery at Steveston. The cannery itself had already been organized but their new fresh fish filleting plant was unorganized apart from some of the men in the skilled trades.

I made contact with a few people there and they mentioned others who seemed most enthusiastic about getting organized. In talking to some of the women workers in the plant I kept hearing 'You should talk to Eva.' They told me that she had been trying to take up grievances on behalf of people working on the line even without a union contract. So I got to meet Eva Vaselanak, who was working as a fillette. She thought that it was high time to get organized. She, along with a few others, took on the job of getting the majority of the women signed up. What I did was mainly to carry the union documents back and forth and set up the organizational meetings when they were held.

The main issue was that wages were about thirty cents an hour below those in unionized operations in Vancouver. Ken Fraser, the plant manager, took the line that they weren't cutting as good a quality fish as their Vancouver plant and that the recovery rate was lower, so they couldn't afford to pay the same wage rates. That didn't hold much water because he'd recently been bragging that they were getting a better recovery rate from the filleters at Steveston than in Vancouver.

One of the problems, as in any organizational drive, was that some people were afraid that if they signed up in a union they'd be fired or discriminated against in some way. We emphasized the necessity of getting organized for exactly those reasons, for their own protection. We said that if we got the majority signed up there was no way the company would be able to discriminate against union members. Yet we did run into exactly that situation.

Before we had gotten union certification Ken Fraser fired three or four people who were among the first to join up and who had taken on the responsibility of talking to others on the job about the union during the organizing campaign. What we did was to hold a mass meeting and confront the employer, immediately, with the threat that if he didn't reinstate those particular workers we'd shut the plant down. We were still in the process of organizing but we didn't feel that we were absolutely dependent on certification. If we thought we could shut the plant down we'd do it, even if it was only for a couple of days. We'd hard-time them till they backed off the firing. All those people
who had been fired were brought back and after a time we got the filleting plant organized.

Eva Vaselanak really led that struggle for organization, to achieve the first contract. She was elected as the chief shop steward among the women and a fellow by the name of John Retalick was elected for the men on the plant-wide shop steward committee. Eva's house down in the center of Steveston became a sort of an unofficial union hall. People would drop in at all hours of the day and night, dealing with problems which came up in the plant. I often wondered how Eva managed it, because she had a large family who depended upon her for support.

Somewhat later Eva was hired on by the union as a full time organizer. Her main responsibility was among the shoreworkers but she did a bang-up job all along the Steveston waterfront. She used to travel back and forth along the dyke to the various fish camps by bicycle. Eva had the ability to sit down with fishermen and packer crews and get to the root of whatever problems they had. She had a good rapport with fishermen as well as with plant workers.

Yes, there was that split between 'women's jobs' and 'men's jobs' and in fact between 'men's world' and 'women's world'. That was the way most people thought about it. Eva must have gotten the line from fishermen, "Well, you sure understand what it's about but shouldn't you be working among the women in the plant?" But she had a way of laughing off things like that.

In any case, Eva was elected to the General Executive Board prior to becoming a full time organizer and she was a delegate at the annual conventions but she hardly ever spoke up in meetings. I've seen that amongst men too. It's almost like pulling teeth to get them to stand up and say anything to groups larger than ten people. But in face to face discussion Eva had a tremendous personality and got along very well with fishermen and her fellow workers in the plant.

There were also people like Florence Greenwood who worked in the Coop plant in Prince Rupert and who was one of the leading shop stewards there. She was on the local executive and eventually became a full time organizer in the Prince Rupert area, on the waterfront as well as in the plants. She got to know just about every member of the union there, fisherman, tenderman, and shoreworker. Florence seemed to know them and their families and had a tremendous memory for detail of that kind.

That sort of capacity, that kind of contact with people, is crucial to any kind of organizing. It means that the organizer can sort out the legitimate grievances from those which are mainly imagined - which happens too sometimes. They can deal with grievances which aren't reasonable without getting into an argument that leaves the person feeling that the union isn't looking after their interests. Flo was the kind of person who could do that. She did, they all did, an outstanding job.

Another one of the shop stewards at the Imperial plant was Mickey Beagle; she had a long involvement in the labour movement prior to that. Mickey had grown up around New Westminster but had lived many years around some of the lumber communities in the western United States. She and her husband came back to B.C. during the late forties.
and Mickey got a job in the canneries and later became the chief shop steward at the Imperial plant. Later she took over Eva's job as shoreworker organizer and eventually rose to various positions in the union, including vice president. Mickey could debate issues publicly with anyone.

Her responsibilities were focused on shoreworker organizing, ranging from Steveston and the Vancouver waterfront on up to Prince Rupert. By then the majority of people in the upcoast plants had been organized. But it was seasonal organization and a lot of new people who came in each year had to be brought into the union. Maybe I can say a little more about some of the tasks and problems we faced in keeping the canneries organized when we talk about our organizing trips along the central and north coast by boat.
Political Decisions

I was raised in a C.C.F. environment. My father was a member of the C.C.F. and so were many of my relatives and the people I knew. That's where I started from in terms of my political outlook.

My father's two brothers, Peter and Andrew, lived on Saltspring and operated one seineboat or another during those years but they generally had the same political outlook as my father. Andrew was quite active in the C.C.F. and he wasn't opposed to union organization in the fishing industry, although both of them had the kind of outlook you'd expect of working owners of a seineboat.

Pete and I sometimes got into pretty sharp arguments about the UFAWU yet he had the greatest respect for people like Butch Malyea, who was one of the veteran organizers of the union. He might say, "Don't wind up giving your whole life to the union like Butch Malyea did and find in the end that they turn on you." Which would rile me.

But they didn't have that much of a political insight because when the British Labour government came to power in 1945 they celebrated it as if socialism was now going to be installed in Britain. Like a lot of other people they didn't understand what the Labour Party's program would be once it got into office. Neither did I at the time.

Near the end of the war I began to mingle with people in my trade union work who were members of the Communist party, though I didn't always know they were. About that time we heard that a man by the name of Bill Rigby, who had been in a Canadian prison camp for being a Communist, had been hired as the editor of *The Fisherman*, the union newspaper. Word was spread among fishermen, mainly by people hostile to the union anyway, that the union had hired a guy who had come out of prison and who was a traitor to Canada and a Communist and so forth. That sparked my interest. "I've got to meet this guy and find out a little more about him," I thought.

Over the years I spent a lot of time arguing with Bill Rigby about politics. Because I was by no means convinced that the Labour Progressive Party, as it was called then, was the kind of party that would 'lead Canada to socialism.' Yes, that is the way I would have thought and phrased it then. I'm running together my thoughts from the last war years to late 1945.

I was trying to decide if the L.P.P. were really committed to bringing about socialism or not. While they talked about socialism in their literature their whole program seemed to be mainly broad social reforms. I remember a booklet written by Earl Browder called *Victory and After*, his estimate of what was going to happen after the war. It sounded to me like the old story of the lion lying down with the lamb. The L.P.P. seemed to be following in that direction too. But as far as I could see the companies here and the capitalist class in general were just as rapacious and unchanging in their dealings with
workers as they had always been. That there was no reason to expect them to change and they might easily become even more ferocious in the future.

At the time I was still an active member of the C.C.F. and went to the riding association meetings held by Len Shepherd, then the C.C.F. Member of the Legislature for Delta. I asked him what the C.C.F. was going to do about the fishing industry, what their policies were about the forest industry and so on. Because I couldn't find any definite policy statements in their literature.

Shepherd answered, in effect, that when they took power provincially they would find out what the fishermen wanted and then do that. That was so vague a statement it could have been made by the Liberals. It didn't satisfy me. Since we had loads of fishermen in our ranks why couldn't the C.C.F. work out some clear policy now. Would we create Cooperatives in the industry or were they going to run the fish plants as state owned companies? It began to seem that they had no long term policy other than getting elected.

Besides, there were rightwing elements in the C.C.F. who were vociferously anti-communist even before the cold war began. Some of them were even more rabid than the Liberals and Conservatives, on the whole. There were people like Tom Alsbury who then cut quite a figure in the press as a 'spokesman of labour' but who wound up in the Social Credit party by the fifties. Just as bad was Birt Showler, the local head of the Teamsters. They made slanderous statements to the press attacking the leadership of the U.F.A.W.U at the drop of a hat.

One of the things that decided me to leave the C.C.F was a move that was made to dump the leadership of our union. A group in the C.C.F. decided that they were going to get rid of Bill Rigby, who by then was secretary-treasurer, and George Miller, who was president of the union. The attack was being directed by Eileen Talman, who worked for the Steelworkers and was a delegate to the Vancouver Labour Council. She invited a number of fishermen who were members of the C.C.F., myself included, to a meeting in the Steelworkers Hall to consider how to go about getting rid of Rigby and Miller.

I wanted to know why she wanted them out. "Well, they're Communists," she said.

"That doesn't cut any ice with me. There are other Communists and people in the C.C.F. and people who are neither working together in our union. Those two officers seem to be the hardest working, most far seeing people we have".

"Don't you realize that they're spending a lot of time doing party work instead of doing the job they should for the union," she says.

"They must sure have one hell of a pile of energy," I said. Because I knew that they were engaged in union work from morning to night, just going crazy with everything that needed to be done.

"Well" says Talman, "You don't understand it. You're out fishing a lot. There are times when they're working for party activities when they should be doing union work."

She was saying that they were sacrificing the best interests of the union to the interests of the party. One of the charges that Talman had against Rigby and Miller was that they were spending time discussing their views with people like me. I didn't see anything wrong with that. But it didn't matter what I said; the decision had already been made that
they were going to dump Rigby and Miller. That decision had been made elsewhere, in some other caucus.

"Well, who do you intend to replace them with," I asked. And she named a couple of people who I knew as fishermen. Both good enough people, I had enough respect for them but I had my own estimation of the comparative capabilities and said so.

"I don't believe that you're making a good judgement. These two people just don't have the same ability as Rigby and Miller. To simply go in and try to dump the union's present leadership, it doesn't make sense to me."

It was pretty outrageous actually. "You work for the Steelworkers and this is the Steelworkers office we're meeting in. You've got us meeting here about a union that you're not a member of. You're using Steelworkers offices and Steelworkers money to do the very thing that you're condemning Miller and Rigby for."

I was never invited back to any further meeting of that caucus. But at that point I had made up my mind. And I did help, very energetically, as a C.C.F. member, to convince the other C.C.F. members at the next union convention not to dump Rigby and Miller.

If it hadn't been for people like Alsbury and Talman and many others it might have taken longer to shake me from my long association with the C.C.F. But I came to the conclusion that C.C.F. couldn't provide the kind of leadership that the trade union movement ought to have. Mainly because of the large right wing element which the C.C.F. tolerated within its ranks and which, a good part of the time, set the policies. That became quite obvious when the cold war really got going. The right wing of the C.C.F. became the most vociferous proponents of McCarthyism inside the trade union movement in both of the Labour Congresses.

As a result of all those things I decided to join the L.P.P. So in March or April of 1946, at about the same time that I went to work as an organizer for the U.F.A.W.U, I finally joined the party. It wasn't so unusual. It was something which other people were doing at the time.

When I joined the L.P.P. my father got a lot of questions thrown at him from people I'd grown up with. At one point he said, 'It appears I've been sitting on duck eggs.' You used to set hens on duck eggs to hatch them out - the hen doesn't know any different. So he was implying that he'd hatched out something which he didn't know where it came from.

My mother never said how she felt about me going into union work and joining the Communist party. She left it to me to make my own decisions, perhaps because she wasn't so involved in things happening outside the family. Her basic feeling was that "You can believe what you like but your first loyalty should be to your family."

**Going Overseas**

In 1947 I was approached by the National Federation of Labour Youth on whether I was willing to go as a Canadian delegate to the first World Youth Festival to be held in Prague that year. The idea was to get all trade unions and all other progressive organizations to act together to prevent another war. By that time I was working full time as an organizer for
the union and my first reaction was that there was no possibility of my going. The festival was going to be held sometime in July when organizational work among fishermen would be at the height.

You might figure that with everything I'd been involved in going to a World Youth Festival would seem a little juvenile. I thought that too at first and asked some questions about it. I was told that the ages of delegates ranged from sixteen to thirty. 'You're not going to be the only young adult there. It's not going to be a juvenile delegation. You'd meet people your age over there who have fought through the war and who are probably more advanced politically than you are,' the organizers said to me. And that was largely true. In fact, it turned out to be one of the most important experiences of my life.

Still, I didn't see how I could possibly leave my job but they kept after me to go. So I finally approached Danny Cordoni, who I knew to be a capable guy, and persuaded him to take my place for at least four months. The next question was how to raise the funds for the trip. We raised funds through voluntary donations from people in the fishing industry. That money was pooled among the delegates but each person had to raise at least five hundred dollars themselves. In my own community there was hardly a family who didn't contribute a few bucks to send me over.

Our delegation from British Columbia was composed mostly of young working people who were politically active; there was somebody from the logging industry, another from construction, myself from fishing, another from mining. There were ten of us from British Columbia in the total Canadian delegation of some ninety odd people, thirty of whom were students from McGill University, which included people from a wide range of political inclinations.

I went with the intention that on this occasion for sure I wasn't going to be involved in any leadership role. I wanted to be free to absorb as much as I could and not have to handle a lot of responsibilities. But it didn't work out that way.

There were difficulties with our visas to be ironed out in Britain and then we went to Paris for a week. From there we took the train to Prague. On that trip we passed through Nuremberg. For those of us who hadn't been overseas and seen the destruction of the war it was one of the most powerful lessons of what modern war meant. To see that city blasted flat with hardly a house left standing and to see the people begging for food at the railway station, in rags and starving. It was a powerful reminder to why we were there.

We got to Prague two weeks before the Festival was to begin and while waiting for the rest of the delegation to arrive we stayed at a construction site near a small town called Horny Litvinov. There we helped Czech youth groups clear the site for some new housing for the miners.

It soon became evident that even among the Czech youth delegates there were people who had differences with the direction the government was taking in some policies. For instance, many of the Czech university students were hostile that the government had set wage rates for miners that were higher than they themselves would get when they first started working as a doctor or sometimes comparable. I once said to a few of them, 'I know miners in Canada and have heard about the accidents which occur in the mines and
the number of people who have been killed and injured. So if you think that the miners here are being treated too well why don't you take a job as a miner. Then you could get those high wages you were talking about." They weren't impressed by that argument.

One of the debates that arose was about the Sudeten Germans. A number of us thought, I was one of them, that it was a cruel thing to take some three million people and simply drive them from the country. But the Czechs argued that it was something that we couldn't possibly understand - the feelings of the Czechoslovakian people toward the German people. Their argument was that, in the main, the German population had sided with the occupation.

Some of the people in our group had some knowledge of the background to what had happened. But the Czech delegates argued their position vociferously and rightly or wrongly we had to listen to them. Obviously there was a deep animosity there. But what we were thinking, those of us with a socialist or a communist perspective, was 'How could Czechoslovakia, a country that had suffered so much under Hitlerism, which was based upon race supremacy, how could it happen that a new Czechoslovakian government dedicated to uprooting all vestiges of Nazism, how could they treat the entire German population in that way.

We raised that quite openly with the Czechoslovakian delegates. No, they didn't tell us not to meddle in their affairs. They argued their views. But in a sense that response was there because what they said in essence was," You didn't suffer the things that we did during the war therefore you can't understand our reaction." They were trying to convince us that their position was the only one that they could have taken under the circumstances.

Certainly there is a long history of national antagonisms in central Europe with every group having its own rationale. That was one of the things we were concerned about. Whether there was going to be a continuation of the kinds of things which had happened in the past. After all, the very theme of the World Youth Festival was that we were all brothers and sisters under the skin and that we should be working for peace regardless of where we came from.

Anyway, after two weeks at that construction camp we returned to Prague as the remaining delegates to the Festival arrived. It was a tremendous experience to be with the other groups as they came in and began to set up their sections and began to arrange interchanges with other delegations. There was so much going on and it was so varied that it's impossible to even list it all.

The Italians and the British had almost five thousand delegates there. Of the major European countries I don't think many had less than a couple of thousand delegates. The Soviet delegation was huge. But there were also delegations coming out of places in Africa or South America that only had a dozen or so people, some of whom had to come out of their countries in an underground way simply to get to Prague.

There were sporting competitions between national soccer teams and volleyball teams. There were exhibitions by artists and performers. There was so many activities in terms of song and dance and various sorts of meetings that we had to divide our ninety
delegates to go to a variety of events and have them report back to the rest of us what each
had seen and heard.

Towards the end of the Festival the leader of the Canadian delegation seemed to have
lost her sense of direction and our group was in turmoil. So we had a meeting to elect a
new leadership and at the same time decide where we were going to go after the Festival.
We had offers to tour a couple of socialist countries but the fellow leading the McGill
group, a Yugoslav student by the name of Leon Davicho, persuaded us to go to
Yugoslavia to do volunteer work on the Youth Railway. At the same time I was elected to
lead the delegation.

There were some debates within our group about why we should go to Yugoslavia.
The Yugoslav youth organization had told us that the first three weeks would be spent
helping reconstructing the railway between Samac and Sarajevo and after that we would
be taken on a tour of the country. Our delegation had reached an agreement on that but in
the short space of getting to Yugoslavia some of our people were beginning to resent the
fact that they would be working. We began to organize ourselves into a work group,
which presented a lot of difficulties because we had people of so many different
backgrounds in our group, from individuals who had worked in industry to others who
had never really worked with their hands before. We also had political conflicts since our
group had people who ranged from Communists to Social Democrats to Conservatives.

Another area of conflict arose over the fact that there had to be some form of discipline
in the group. We were in a part of Yugoslavia, in Bosnia, where living conditions were
quite poor and the temperature at mid day was over a hundred degrees in August. The
section we were rebuilding was in a very mountainous region and the line followed one of
the old narrow gauge railroads which ran beside a river bed. Our work was in building up
the grade in preparation for laying the ties and rails. We dug up earth from alongside the
grade with picks and shovels, packed it up on old wheelbarrows and dumped it on the rail
bed and then tamped it down with some of the most primitive tools imaginable. The
Yugoslav youth groups did the major part of the work on that railway. They were blasting
through rock and blasting out tunnels and laying the rail.

We broke our group up into smaller units and tried to have some stronger people in
each one. We said that if anyone couldn't hack it they should sit down and take a rest, not
to push it. Because we didn't want people getting sick. At first we had some problems
trying to find that balance between those who could work hard and those who couldn't.
People would begin to challenge each other as to whether they were sluffing or really
couldn't do it. On the other hand, some people drove themselves beyond their own
capabilities.

Some of us had been used to hard work but there were others for whom it was too
much. Some were laid up after a few days, their hands raw with blisters. Others got bad
sunburns and had to lay up. But after a couple of weeks, considering the mix of people
we had, the amount of fill we moved was pretty remarkable. We did feel we made some
material contribution, really.
In the evenings we often had meetings with other work delegations up and down that railway line. Small meetings, big ones, campfire sessions and what not. There were people who had come from all over the world on that reconstruction project. We met French and Italians and Bulgarians - you name it.

After our three week stint on the railway part of our group were taken on a tour of Belgrade while others went to Zagreb. My part of the group came back through Sarajevo to Dubrovnik and then came up the coast to Zadar.

What the trip and discussions and everything did was to broaden our outlook. Most of us had had some quite fallacious concepts, almost fairy stories, about what we could expect to happen. "Look, you don't change a system that easily or that quickly. There are conflicts between the Serbs and Croatians and we've got this and we've got that to deal with." The Yugoslavs tried to explain some of that to us. If we only understood some of it we still got a better grasp of the background to what was happening in Yugoslavia and through that we could discern a little better what was happening in similar countries. We ended our trip at Rijeka and after a wait there of about a week boarded the Yugoslav freighter which was going to take us back to North America. It took us nineteen days to get back to Canada.

The Canadian delegation as a whole gathered in Toronto to give our report before we scattered to our homes. The cold war atmosphere was emerging prior to our departure but all of us noticed how strong it had become on our return. Everybody had the impression that a major change had taken place just in the four months that we'd been away. We had been out of touch with what had been appearing in the Canadian press during that period and then to step into this barrage of cold war propaganda - the view that we had been behind the Iron Curtain and that either we were a bunch of dupes or the agents of a foreign country. All that kind of thing coming down on our heads.

When I got back to Vancouver the officers of the union expected me to get back to union work immediately. But I was so fired up about what I had seen that I said, "No, I'm not going back immediately. I've got to spent a month or two months or maybe longer going around the province to report on the trip." I didn't have any money either so I had to beg my way around the province.

When our B.C. delegation gave a talk on the trip the Vancouver press trotted out one "Mr. X" who was going to expose how we had been engaged in all sorts of subversive activities, either prior to our departure or while in Europe. There was a column in the Vancouver Sun which said that I had been fighting with the Greek partisans in the hills. Stories cut from whole cloth.

We held one big meeting at the Pender Auditorium where we expected that there might be some sort of altercation. There were hints in the press of people who said that they were going to come to that meeting and break it up. That didn't actually materialize but there were efforts made to stir something up. But in travelling around the province talking about the World Youth Festival I didn't have any problems, other than the skepticism of people who wondered if I was a fool for not having seen what they were being told by the press.
Maybe I haven't gotten to the essence of it. I think that seeing all these things - the ravages of war, the bitter animosities that had raged, the poverty in some places, but also the hopes of people in the places we were - we had all read about it and heard about it, but it wasn't the same as experiencing it first hand. Not by a long shot. The whole issue of peace and the participation of the trade union movement with that has been a continuing concern of mine ever since. Because even in unions which had a left wing leadership there was a long period when any discussion of peace was considered almost subversive.

Also, it was during this period that I became convinced of my basic political philosophy. You may have gotten the impression that I was already a politically convinced person when I went to the World Youth Festival. But there were a host of things that transpired through meeting other people there. What I encountered on that trip either confirmed what I'd already been pondering or dissuaded me of some of the fallacies that I had.

Sherman's March to the Sea

In addition to the beginnings of the cold war in general, there were developments in the United States which were of immediate concern to fishermen and a warning of what might be used against us in Canada next. It was what happened to the International Fishermen and Allied Workers of America on the West Coast of the United States. I.F.A.W.A. was more of a federation than a single union, such as ours is. They included unions from the Sacramento River and most of the Californian ports, up through Oregon and Washington and into Alaska. They were an active and energetic organization but because they were a federation there were considerable differences in the types of contracts they held.

In 1947 Tommy Parkin, the UFAWU shoreworker organizer, and I went down to the I.F.A.W.A. convention in Wilmington, California. They had already been served with a notice that the Sherman Anti-Trust Act was going to be used to halt their contract bargaining between the Sacramento River Fishermen's Union and the packing companies. That was the first I'd heard that the Sherman Act could be used against unions. Eventually that did happen.

Joe Jurich, the president of I.F.A.W.A. then, was going to make a tour of the fishing ports along Oregon and Washington after the convention and invited us to come along with him. We were able to discuss some of the problems which Jurich saw shaping up. What it amounted to was whether they would be able to take some collective job action in the fishing industry to convince the U.S. government to back off from using the Sherman Act. He didn't say which way he thought it was going to go but I got the impression that he figured they were going to have a lot of difficulty in mobilizing that sort of an action. The timing would be difficult because of the differences in the fishing seasons, with their members spread from Alaska to California.

In any case, I.F.A.W.A. decided to fight the attack mainly through the courts. They prepared volumes of material showing that, because of the structure of fish marketing and because of the control of every kind of facility by the fish companies, fishermen weren't
much different than workers dependant upon an employer. They also demonstrated that there was no real relationship between the prices which fishermen received and what consumers were paying for fish. They showed that there was no basis for the charges being made by the U.S. government. But despite all their efforts they failed.

The charge laid under the Sherman Act was that contracts for minimum salmon prices paid to fishermen constituted price fixing and was in restraint of trade. That's the whole basis for anti-trust legislation. Supposedly it's to protect the consumers against manipulated prices. The government held that the union contracts of minimum fish prices paid to fishermen were that.

Historically, anti-combination laws had been used against trade unions from the time of the Tolpuddle martyrs on. At one time there were no exemptions for labor unions under common law but over the years exemptions to the Combines Acts were introduced for trade union contracts in both British and American legislation. But those exemptions had never been extended to fishermen. It was open to the companies and their proteges in government to lay combines charges against fishermen involved in collective bargaining.

The first and most important case in California was essentially over whether the Sherman Anti-Trust Act did or did not apply to fishermen. The ruling which came down was, 'Yes, it did apply'. That went through the courts in various stages of appeal and I.F.A.W.A. was repeatedly defeated. The court battles didn't increase the combativeness of their members. As a matter of fact it placed a reliance on getting justice through the courts which, once they came down with their decision - well there it was.

The result, ultimately, was the breakup of the union itself. The ruling meant that their contracts were no longer valid, so they had no foundation, had nothing to base themselves on unless at that stage they were prepared to tie up the entire industry. Applying the Sherman anti-trust legislation against fishermen effectively eliminated collective bargaining in the industry. There was nothing left for the union to bargain with if they couldn't negotiate salmon and other fish prices. So the fishermen's unions in California were smashed. Then the companies moved the same process along the coast; to Oregon and then on to Washington.

Since California was never a big producer of salmon the collapse of collective bargaining there didn't impinge on us in terms of prices. But as that court decision was applied along the American west coast and into the State of Washington it began to effect us directly. Because in Washington the contracts won by the I.F.A.W.A. had often been several steps ahead of ours in terms of the minimum prices for salmon as well as some of the other conditions. They had made steps toward getting such things as Workers Compensation and Unemployment Insurance which were still a long ways in the offing for us.

The turn of the Washington State fishermen came in the early fifties. When their rights of contract bargaining were finally taken away they tried to establish another system of bargaining. They found a loophole in the Sherman Anti-Trust Act which allowed them to bargain with the owners of the boats. Then the vessel owners in turn would have to come to an agreement with the companies to reach a contract price which would make it
possible for them to operate their boats and pay their crews at the level the crew contracts required. But it was an indirect form of contract bargaining which didn't provide the same protections as far as the union was concerned. Over the years that broke down to the point where there was virtually no bargaining going on in the fishing industry in the U.S. The fish prices paid and the crew shares fishermen worked under began to reflect that. They dropped to well below what we had.

The Alaska Fishermen's Union broke away from I.F.A.W.A., which by that time was also being attacked from inside the labor movement on the basis that the I.F.A.W.A. leadership were Reds. For a while it looked as if the Alaska Fishermen's Union was going to be tied in with the Seafarers International but they managed to maintain a degree of independence from any affiliation. But eventually their organization waned during the 1960s and was dissipated.

The IFAWA shorworker organizations were never decertified but they became fragmented into various unions. When I.F.A.W.A. was weakened the shore plants were considered fair game for raiding by other unions. At one point there were five different unions engaged in 'organizing' the shoreplant workers just in the State of Washington. There was I.F.A.W.A., the Machinists, the Teamsters, the 'Meat Cutters' and one other union all in the act.

But effectively the I.F.A.W.A. ceased to exist. What was left of it eventually merged with the International Longshoreman's and Warehouseman's Union, which was itself under attack. They still have a small fishermen's section and some plantworkers under contract but today almost all of the fishermen along the Pacific coast of the U.S. are non union. It's a tragic thing, from the viewpoint of a fisherman.

Sobering Realities

It would be fair to ask how my views on unions as mass organizations of the working class have changed over the years. It's always difficult to go back and think of the specific moments and issues and how your outlook changed.

Let's put it this way: when I first became involved in the fishermen's union, people I knew were saying, "If we're going to have an organization that's worth anything it should be an industrial union covering all aspects of the fish industry". I think that some of us had stars in our eyes about what could be accomplished, considering the realities of how the labour federations and the labour congresses were constituted. But there has always been, at the rank and file level and among many union officers, the idea that yes, we do have to stand together because finally we are all a part of the working class. I've noticed that feeling at labour congress conventions no matter what the policies of the national executives might be. I don't think the question of 'solidarity' is romantic. If you listen to the discussions and read the correspondence of the labour movement today, they are always talking about solidarity, although it's often not practiced as it ought to be.

But how did 'solidarity' work in the Vancouver Labour Council, which the UFAWU was a member of? At the time there were two Labour Councils in the city of Vancouver, one affiliated with the Canadian Congress of Labour and the other with the Trades and
Labour Congress of Canada. There were disputes between them and they were raiding each other and what not. If a union was in a tough battle it was difficult to get support across the board because that union wasn't in one or the other of the Labour Councils. At the outset I didn't know that much about it but when I became a delegate of the VLC, I got to see some of the in-fighting that went on there.

That difficulty didn't always exist, however. An example of inter-union solidarity was the Vancouver Province dispute with its typographical unions. I was a new delegate to the Vancouver Labour Council when the strike started in late '46 and I got elected to a committee whose job it was to round up pickets. The Province had gotten an injunction against picketing by the typographical workers and the International officers of the Typographical Union had ordered their members to obey the injunction and not go anywhere near the picket line around the Province. The effect was that others in the printing trades were being required to cross the line and go back to work.

One of my jobs was to go around, trying to get pickets out and then go down to see that they were on the line. We had pickets from almost every union in the city there at one time or another - sometimes only fifty or a hundred but in one major confrontation almost four thousand pickets.

Initially I believed that the officers of most of the unions had ideas similar to mine. But you soon come up against the fact that the overwhelming majority of trade union officers are not inclined to support any changes which would challenge capitalism in any way. Some might go as far as supporting the social aims of the CCF but a lot of them are not even willing to go that far. The reality is that unions, because of their concentration on advancing the economic interests of their members, have come to believe that they can resolve their problems within the framework of capitalism. "Join the union and work to advance it and you'll get higher wages and better conditions, and over the years we'll gradually be able to get some of the social legislation you need."

There is some truth in that view. But there are very definite limits to what can be achieved, and nothing is secure. When you run up against mass unemployment or massive plant shutdowns or any number of other structural problems, all the gains that unions have made over the years can be stripped away in nothing flat. Unions have often abandoned the unemployed in their own industry because there was nothing they could do to protect them.
8.

COLD WAR BATTLES

I Become Secretary-Treasurer

Before I was elected to the job of secretary-treasurer of the UFAWU in 1948 I already basically knew the reason for Bill Rigby's decision to retire from the post. Bill wasn't a fisherman and he wasn't a shoreworker, he didn't emerge from the industry. But he was far ahead of most of us in his insight into how events were developing.

Bill Rigby did an awful lot in resolving some of the basic conflicts within the union during the years he was secretary-treasurer. He could do that and did do that even though he sometimes only had a sketchy idea of the practical details of fishing. He would question knowledgeable fishermen on whether he understood some particular aspect correctly. I could hardly believe that he could know so little about the details of fishing and yet be so insightful about how to handle the broader questions facing the union.

After the first steps of the cold war were taken he could guess how it was going to develop, with the expulsion of union executives and entire unions from the labour movement. Bill approached me with the idea that he would retire and that I should run for the post of secretary-treasurer. He put it to me in very straight forward terms. That because of his own background, because he wasn't a fisherman and didn't arise from the industry, it would be easier for the right wing within the labour movement to isolate him within the UFAWU than someone like me. That the campaign against him would be to treat him as an outsider but that there was no way that that charge could be used against me. He thought that my connections in the industry might be just enough to tip the balance in resisting attacks that were bound to be made on our union executive. As well as being an organizer for the union I was known up and down the coast by fishermen as a fisherman.

I was still pretty young to be running for leadership of the union and it took some faith to ask the membership to support my election. But there really weren't many other candidates. It wasn't easy to get people to take union jobs. Most people had to be persuaded to take on even a simple organizer's job. It was those who were dedicated to building and preserving the union who took the work.

For one thing, the union had very little money and the wages of union staff and officers were pitifully low. When I worked for the union as an organizer in 1946 I made something like seventeen to eighteen hundred dollars for the entire year. People who I'd fished with made something like five to six thousand dollars that year. By 1948 my salary as secretary-treasurer of the union had climbed to fifty dollars a week. The top union officers were getting paid less than what qualified machine operators earned in the canneries and much less than what the better fishermen earned on average. That was the case throughout, right to the present day.
The work load was heavy. Everybody knew that. There was the constant pressure that comes with a job like that, where you are almost a prize fighter for the membership and also trying to resolve conflicts among them.

There were only two salaried full time union officers, the secretary-treasurer and the business agent. Alex Gordon had been the business agent of the shoreworkers and kept that position when they merged into the UFAWU. The union presidency was then an unpaid position and was held by a working fisherman, Steve Stavenes, who had originally been a leader of the Salmon Purse Seiners Union. The table officers, which included the vice presidents elected to represent the various sections of the industry, were all unpaid positions. The members of the General Executive Board didn't receive any salary and neither did any of the executives of the locals scattered along the coast.

The only union staff at the time were the four full-time organizers we had to cover the entire industry. There was one organizer in Prince Rupert, another coast-wide fisherman's organizer, one shoreworker organizer and the Fraser River District organizer. There was also the editor of the *Fisherman*.

That was it. The entire paid staff of the union.

The funds available for expenses were such that you normally couldn't afford a car and if you went anywhere you always tried to bunk at some member's house because you wanted to avoid hotel bills if you possibly could.

The man who ran against me for the position of secretary-treasurer had a fairly good grasp of union policy but he was crippled up. He might have done a quite reasonable job around the office but he couldn't have gone around amongst the fishermen, as that job required. There were other people around who I thought would have made excellent officers of the union but they just wouldn't take the job. It was always difficult to get somebody to take on full time jobs in the union. It wasn't easy to get the people who had the various capabilities to do the job well. It was partly monetary but it was also the ties they had to the industry - not wanting to give up fishing for an office job. I felt that way myself many times.

I told everybody that I didn't intend to become closeted in the union office as secretary-treasurer and made it clear that a good deal of my time would be spent out among the fishermen. To my mind that was part and parcel of the job. You had to be there to hear what the membership was saying about what the union should be doing - apart from what they would bring up in union meetings. I couldn't see being an effective officer by just sitting in an office and I said so. That was about the extent of my campaign for the office.

There was some feeling amongst the membership that while I worked well as an organizer and in other union capacities I was still pretty young to be representing the union as a whole. I myself didn't think I was on par with somebody like Alex Gordon, who was an accomplished speaker and a capable union leader in many respects. It didn't bother me that people thought I was a bit green. In fact, during the first four or five years as secretary-treasurer I was still learning the job.

I had taken on the job under certain provisos. One was that I would not be expected to know all the ins and outs of the job immediately and that I would need some help.
Another was, I didn't feel capable of making major presentations to government ministries and bodies at first. So I expected some help in that area too.

Unfortunately, it soon developed that I was stuck in the office - more than I wanted - under the demands of contract negotiating and preparing briefs. But during the first ten to twelve years I spent a lot of time getting around to every local in the union. Both those along the Fraser and in Vancouver and those up and down the coast.

There's something to the view that to be a union officer you have to have a thick hide. But my own hide had to thicken as I went along. I sometimes had a pretty explosive temper but I'd promised Bill Rigby that I wouldn't allow myself to get dragged into fights. Although I broke that once or twice when I was attacked physically I learned to swallow an awful lot of insults from people.

**Expulsions and Raids**

The year 1948 saw the attack on the Canadian Seamen's Union. Their West Coast local was close to us and I knew people like Jimmy Thompson and others in the C.S.U. quite well. We were very aware of their difficulties.

There had already been the legal battle in Nova Scotia in 1946 between the Zwicker Company and the Canadian Fishermen's Union, which had been organized by and was affiliated with the Canadian Seamen's Union. It was in that case that Canadian fishermen had been legally defined as 'co-adventurers,' petty entrepreneurs, and not admissible for union certification. It effectively smashed unionization among East Coast fishermen for the next twenty years.

In the late spring of '48 Frank Hall of the International Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks made the move to bring Hal Banks and the Seafarers International into Canada to raid the C.S.U. We were never certain who all were behind that because Hall's outfit was just a small moribund union. The matter came up before the Trades and Labour Congress convention and after sharp debate the T.L.C. leadership moved to suspend the Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks for its actions. In the vote that followed something better than two thirds of the delegates voted to uphold the T.L.C. executive in suspending Hall and his union.

A facet of that TLC decision had been a trade-off between the UFAWU and the Teamsters, in the way that deals take place at these congresses. Alex Gordon of our union had been elected as a vice-president of the T.L.C. in the previous convention but Birt Showler of the Teamsters, who had been vice-president, wanted that position back. The Teamsters said that they would go along with the decision supporting the C.S.U. providing that Alex didn't run for the T.L.C. vice-presidency again. We debated amongst ourselves about that because we suspected that the Teamsters would reverse themselves once they got the vice-presidency back. In the following year they did precisely that.

In the interim a great deal of pressure had been applied on the T.L.C. by the International (i.e. American) unions. The leadership of the T.L.C. reversed itself and turned against the Canadian Seamen's Union at the Calgary convention the following year, at what became known among trade unionists as the 'Calgary Stampede'. It ended up with
a vote in which the majority went against the C.S.U., effectively sanctioning the raids by the Seafarers International and ending with the complete destruction of the Canadian union in the shipping industry.

From 1949 on there were similar attacks, all aimed at ousting any left-wing leadership of unions. There were cases, such as the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union, where the whole local executive was removed by the International (i.e. American) headquarters of the union. The Hotel and Restaurant Workers in Vancouver at that time had probably the strongest organization in that industry which existed anywhere in Canada. They had organized scores of restaurants in Vancouver, all the way from those with two and three employees to some of the largest ones in the city. But by 1951 the Hotel and Restaurant local here had been decimated. The new executive which had been installed lost contract after contract and what few contracts they held on to became inferior to what they had been. It was a terrible cost to those men and women working in that industry.

Another one of the attacks was on the Vancouver Civic Outside Workers Union. When their delegates arrived at the Trades and Labour Congress convention they were told that they were not going to be admitted until the union 'purged itself' of its leadership. Eventually the T.L.C. named the whole executive of that union which they wanted removed. A man by the name of Carl Berg was appointed by the T.L.C. to take charge of the Vancouver Civic Outside Workers. After attempting to compel the local to get rid of it's leadership by threats he set up a rump organization and proceeded to raid the union.

We condemned that in policy resolutions and The Fisherman carried an editorial condemning this T.L.C. sanctioned raid. The editorial used phrases like, 'As long as there are unprincipled elements in the leadership of the trade union movement this form of cannibalism will continue.'

Since it was an editorial and the paper was under the control of the UFAWU it could be taken as the union's position. Which it was. We then got a letter from the Trades and Labour Congress demanding that we retract those statements or further action would be taken. We discussed that in our General Executive Board and decided that we had nothing to apologize for. George North, the editor of the Fisherman, had written the editorial but we felt that it was the truth. So we refused to print a retraction.

In the following annual UFAWU convention there was an organized attempt to oust the leadership of the union elections. An opposition slate contested the positions of business agent, president and secretary-treasurer. What their line amounted to was that if you went with them there would be a cornucopia of jobs and benefits all the way down the line. While if you stayed with the old leadership you were going to have nothing but strikes wrecking the industry, continuous turmoil, lower living standards and so forth.

They did manage to capture something like a third of the ballots in that referendum. But when that challenge to our leadership failed things sort of settled down in the union. It cut the ground out from under raids against us before they started. Our members felt that they had properly elected their officers and even most of those who had voted for the opposition slate felt that they weren't about to be told they had to dump their officers by some other body.
We went to the 1953 T.L.C. convention but nothing was said about action against us. By then the kinds of policies which were being adopted by the T.L.C. were affected by the cold war on just about everything - from union matters to domestic policies to international affairs.

For instance, the question arose in the convention of respecting picket lines. Delegates were talking about recent government rulings which held that if you were offered a job in a struck plant and refused to cross a picket line you could be cut off unemployment insurance. It was clearly a case of government involvement in strikebreaking. The attitude of unions has always been that you just don't cross a picket line - period! And then to hear Percy Bengough, the president of the T.L.C., get up and say, 'You've got a contract. The contract is sacred and you've got to cross'. He was saying that 'You have to cross picket lines if you have a binding contract in a plant.'

There was a witch hunt against anyone who spoke out for peace and disarmament. It was hard to distinguish the kinds of statements coming from the leadership of the T.L.C. calling for what was termed 'defence spending' from those which were promulgated by the Foreign Office of the United States. The point for point similarity was overwhelming.

There was almost nothing that the T.L.C. leadership wouldn't stoop to to push their policies through. One incident took place on the second day of the convention. A person well known as part of the right wing of the labor movement was reported to have been thrown down a flight of stairs and was in the hospital. That was announced with great fanfare from the podium. Without any evidence whatsoever the innuendo planted was that a bunch of dirty commies had beaten-up this poor old man. Immediately there was a line up at the mikes on the convention floor. The 'road men', the Business Reps. of the Internationals, traipsed up to the mikes one after the other and offered hundreds and thousands of dollars in reward money to discover who the dastardly people were amongst the Reds who had done this terrible thing. After the convention was over we discovered that this guy had just been on a drunk and had fallen down the stairs. That was all there was to it. It had never even been reported to the police.

It was so blatant. The whole act was simply a prelude to an attack on those opposed to another one of the rotten resolutions that the T.L.C. executive wanted push through, a resolution committing the T.L.C. to support the defence policies of Nato or something like that. It was so clearly tied together. The fact that they brought up this resolution for a vote immediately after this circus about an alleged assault. About a hundred delegates stood up and voted against the T.L.C. executive on that particular resolution. Immediately, a bunch of delegates who I considered being not much more than goons, stormed over and yelled, "Come on you lousy Reds. Get up." At one point I was at the point of going over the table at one of them. But Alex Gordon, who was sitting beside me, grabbed me by the arm and said "Take it easy. That's exactly what they want us to do."

We in the UFAWU watched all this going on and wondered when they were going to come after us. It happened during the summer of 1953 when I was out with Alex Gordon making an organizing trip up the coast. We were going around Cape Scott, heading for
Winter Harbour, when we heard on the radio that the UFAWU had been suspended from the T.L.C.

After we contacted the T.L.C. offices we got a terse letter which referred to that editorial about 'cannibalism in the labour movement' which we had refused to retract. The letter said that an examination of our record revealed that the leadership of the UFAWU had definite 'Communist leanings' and that unless the union showed that it was able to purge itself of that it was being suspended from the T.L.C.

We appealed our suspension to the next Trades and Labour Congress convention on the basis that our members had the right to elect whom they pleased to the leadership of their union. But of course that was not the way the T.L.C. executive saw it. They had adopted a policy of getting rid of all left-wing trade union leadership and affiliated unions had to follow that policy or be expelled.

The only thing that was somewhat different in our case was that when the suspension ruling was upheld the T.L.C. didn't move to outright expulsion. Instead, they said that any individual local of our union could apply for re-affiliation as a local directly chartered by the T.L.C. The T.L.C. would examine the people in that local executive to see that none of them were tainted with communism. If they passed the test that local could be re-affiliated. We thought that perhaps one or two locals, like Alert Bay, where the majority had voted against us, might go that route. But not a single local did.

Shortly after we were suspended from the T.L.C. we got the word that there was a move afoot by the Seafarers International to raid us. I think it was Norm Cunningham of the Seafarers International, who later became an employer's representative on the Vancouver waterfront, that led the raid. He issued statements that our members were coming over to them in droves. We were then on the fishing grounds and we couldn't find any basis for that claim but we didn't know what was happening everywhere. As it turned out there was only one case, the Campbell River local, where the Seafarers International did take control briefly. They basically took over the local executive.

With our suspension the Seafarers decided that this looked like a profitable chunk of dues-paying members and they thought they'd just move in and take them over. We never did find out whether the T.L.C. had formally endorsed the S.I.U. raid or not and they later avoided that question like the plague. However, there was enough condemnation of the S.I.U. raid from the floor of the Vancouver Labour Council that the executive wouldn't approve it. Nor would the B.C. Federation of Labour.

Actually I don't think that Percy Bengough or the T.L.C. executive were really calling the shots on what the Seafarers International were doing. It was more the other way around. The A.F.of L. leadership in the United States was calling the shots on what was happening here in Canada.

One of the things that worked against the Seafarers International raid on us was that they had brought in nine 'organizers' from the United States and it came out that these guys were packing side arms. If that didn't rebound against them then I don't know what did. Fishermen here just would not tolerate that kind of leadership. 'If these imported
goons try their strong arm tactics here they may find that they are up against a different kind of people than they're used to," I said in a press release. Words to that effect.

However the S.I.U. did temporarily capture the Campbell River local, whose officers set up a new rump organization in preparation to joining the Seafarers and transferred the local's treasury to it. When we heard that had happened I went up to talk with the president and secretary of the local. But they were out fishing. I ran across a fellow by the name of Louie Joyce, who was one of the few who were still doing cod jigging. Louie offered to put me up and I stayed at his house and went down to the docks each day and talked to our members individually about how they saw this move to break away from the UFAWU.

The revealing thing was that they, almost to a man, said they hadn't been consulted about carrying out this breakaway. In fact, I'm pretty sure that a number of those I was talking to had signed an S.I.U. card. But they were already having second thoughts about the whole thing. They were embarrassed to say so. Although some fishermen around Campbell River were antagonistic to us there was also a feeling that they had been suckered into something by this S.I.U. deal.

During a raid a rival union can sign up members while those people still hold on to their original union books. In a raid there will be people carrying books in both organizations. For that reason we would have been presumptuous to think that we knew exactly how many the S.I.U. had signed up - unless they'd actually signed up people by the thousands, in which case we would have known and they'd have made a more open challenge. But unless a member tells you that he has a card in some other organization there is no way you are going to know that.

A number of general membership meetings were held in the Willows Hotel in Campbell River and for a while it looked like the decision was going to go against us. Whenever I got up to say something I'd be booed and jeered. It appeared that it was going to go their way until some of the members I'd been talking to during the previous ten days took the floor. They started to sort out the issues. They said that there wasn't anything which was being raised by the group which wanted to break away that was troubling them. That they hadn't heard any real reasons for breaking from the UFAWU to join the S.I.U. That there was no basis for it. They were angry that this American outfit would simply come in and try to take the local over. 'And what kind of an organization is the Seafarers International anyway? It's led by a gangster by the name of Hal Banks who was brought in to smash another Canadian union, the Canadian Seamen's Union. Some of our members knew that but many others didn't. There were a lot of things that weren't clear to many people at the time.

The debate began to settle down around the issue of what our union really did stand for and why anybody should try to tear it apart. And was this break-away local going to be any better or was it going to be controlled by a gangster-led union from a foreign country. After some sharp debates in meetings with large attendance it became clear that the S.I.U. was not going to make it. Eventually we got the local's funds back and the rump local they were trying to establish became defunct
What the S.I.U. had accomplished was in fact a scam. It was only the first step of a raid. Even in those years there were certain processes required for union decertification. There would have had to be a ballot to determine whether the members wanted to decertify from our union and then recertify in favour of another union. If the local executive agreed to take their local out of one union and into another they still would be confronted with the necessity of having to win contracts from the companies. The Campbell River local was basically a local of fishermen but a real raid against the UFAWU would have to include shoreworkers and tendermen. And among the tendermen and shore plant workers there was never a challenge to us.

So what the S.I.U. would have done was to win over the majority of the fishermen in the Campbell River local and then get a contract for them from the fish companies. Which they might have readily gotten - if that didn't involve the companies in an overall battle with the rest of the union, shoreworkers and all. But it never actually came to that.

It's not easy to pinpoint why the S.I.U. succeeded in the Campbell River local even to the extent they did. It was nothing obvious. There had been some difficulties during the 1952 salmon strike. At one point there was a strong feeling among Campbell River fishermen to accept the company offer and go back fishing. We had asked them to hold out but there had been a lot of dissatisfaction about that. That could have been part of it.

An interesting phenomenon takes place, I've found. If you win a strike it's very difficult afterwards to find anyone who will say they were opposed to the strike to begin with. But if you lose a strike and have to go back without making significant gains you can find no end of people who'll say, "I knew damn well that it was a mistake and we should never have gotten into it". Even if they voted for it in the beginning. But Campbell River wasn't different than any other group of fishermen that way.

Although the T.L.C. and the business reps of the Internationals continually tried to isolate the U.F.A.W.U we still managed to carry on a working relationship with other unions in the province. In fact, as that McCarthyist drive was forced through more and more rank and file members in more and more unions began to say what a haywire situation it was. After a time resolutions were raised in union locals calling for us to be re-admitted to the B.C. Federation of Labour. Some of those resolutions were being adopted as early as 1955. Gradually there were more and more locals which spoke out openly in favour of the UFAWU being reinstated in the B.C. Fed.

Some Personal Dimensions

My hide had to thicken as I went along, and I learned to swallow an awful lot of insults. There were attacks by people like Tom Alsbury, who wrote a series of articles for the Vancouver Sun accusing me and others of mishandling union funds, rigging elections and stuffing ballot boxes to maintain our UFAWU positions. Which was not only false but totally ridiculous to anyone who knew how our balloting was run. At the time I considered going to court and suing him for slander. I gave up the idea as a waste of time.
but an officer of the Boilermakers' Union whom Alsbury had accused of similar misdeeds won an out-of-court settlement, and the *Sun* stopped running the series by Alsbury.

As to the red baiting and the attacks on me personally and on other union officers, that really never had much effect on my outlook. It certainly had an effect on the constraints under which we operated and what you might be able to accomplish, how you worked with others in the trade union movement. But I found that a straight forward approach was best. Attacks by people like Tom Alsbury, who I knew to be an absolute phoney when it came to trade union activity, didn't bother me. I knew him first as a C.C.F.er and then he became a Liberal and finally he wound up in the Social Credit party. So attacks from people like him didn't influence me at all.

But some of our own members were quite sincere in their belief that any officer who was a Communist was a detriment to the union. Because the attacks weren't just on me but on the whole union. I had it put to me by a number of people that I would be serving the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union better if I'd quit the party. Numbers of people in the union said that to me, including on one occasion the president of the union. Steve Stavenes tackled me on it and said that I'd be of more use to the union if I left the party.

"Well, I'm a political guy. I'm committed politically. If you want a political eunuch go get somebody else as the union's leader," I said. "You want my balls? Well you're not going to have them. Either you accept me as I am or turn me out of office," I told him. "I didn't come to this job on the basis of somebody telling me I had to be a Liberal or a C.C.F.er or anything else. Either I'm free to support what I think is right or you'll have to get rid of me. Or I'll quit."

Steve was quite shocked. After getting over his surprise Steve said that he didn't want me to quit. Actually he was quite good about it. He had been a CCF supporter all his adult life, yet he worked with communists, first during the formation of the union and later with people like me.

But no one should underestimate the effect that the campaign of fear and slander against communists had on people who had been our supporters over the years. Many were frightened and didn't know how far it might go. There were undercover agents of the R.C.M.P. right out here in Delta going around trying to find out anything they could to use against our members; questioning neighbours and sometimes going to their employers. People even began to worry how it would effect their children.

One very traumatic incident I remember had to do with Eric Jensen, who was a member of our party group here for years. I had known him and worked with him since I was a kid and he was like an uncle to me in many ways. Sometime during the middle fifties, when the anti-Communist hysteria was at its peak, Eric left the party. He just dropped out without any explanation whatsoever.

I went over to see what the matter was and after I'd talked to him a couple of minutes, out of the blue, he slapped me in the face and told me to get out of his house. Almost immediately after that he broke down and started to cry, he was so shaken, and
apologized. Eric was then in his fifties, a very strong person who had been through a lot and who just didn't behave like that.

"Those two girls have got to be protected from this," he said, meaning his two daughters who were then in grade school. "My beliefs are my own and I haven't changed them. But I'm not going to have them pay for it." In his case I'm sure it was a genuine concern. Eric did leave the party and dropped out of all political activity completely. It was that simple and clear cut in some instance, the effect the intimidation had.

One result was that his daughters, who are now grown with their own families today, know next to nothing about that important part of their father's life, of the struggles he had been involved in Denmark and here and what he believed in. He kept all that closed to them while they were growing up and never mentioned it later. That is a tragic thing, in my estimation.
EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE UNION

Lobbying and the Fisheries

We came through that period of suspension and raids. But it didn’t make it any easier to carry on our lobbying campaigns for legislative amendments in matters critical to fishermen.

To begin with, there was no union certification for fishermen. The fact is that fishermen have never been clearly defined in the labour codes as to whether they were workers or not. There was the earlier case between Zwicker Company and the Canadian Fishermen’s Union in Nova Scotia, the original court decision was that fishermen were indeed workers and that their union had a right to be certified. But in the appeal court fishermen were defined as ‘co-adventurers,’ as petty entrepreneurs, and not subject to union certification. It was something we constantly had to fight against and try to change through legislative amendment. Because of those efforts there is now legislation on the books which provides for fishermen to be certified as independent operators. But it’s been a constant battle.

We were also involved in lobbying for changes in Workers Compensation. At that time the only fishermen who were covered were the crews on the salmon and herring seiners. Most fishermen couldn’t get coverage for Workers Compensation even if they were prepared to pay the costs themselves. We were trying to change the legislation so that the companies paid the Compensation Insurance out of the fish they bought. But mainly we wanted to make sure that every fisherman was covered.

There’d be serious accidents on the boats all the time and the fishermen would be left high and dry. There were losses at sea, in the halibut fleet for example, where we would lose six or seven men at a crack. Their families would receive no compensation whatsoever.

At one point we organized a massive demonstration in Victoria. Over a hundred fish boats sailed into the inner harbour, blowing their whistles and raising a ruckus. We marched around the Legislature and a delegation met with the M.L.A.s.

The first legislative amendment we got opened compensation insurance to fishermen on a voluntary basis as independent operators. It was not what we wanted but we tried for years to make that work. Wherever we had a boat clearance program in the industry we tried to make it a condition that crewmen had to have their Workers Compensation coverage paid up to get a union clearance.

That campaign went on for more than twenty years, presenting our arguments before at least two Royal Commissions on the Compensation Act. We didn’t get Workers Compensation for fishermen as a checkoff until the N.D.P. government was in power and we even had to twist their arm to get it.

We were engaged in a similar battle on the federal level to define what fishermen are for purposes of unemployment insurance. Fishermen were excluded from unemployment
insurance coverage unless they were paid on a straight wage basis, which was nowhere the case. From time to time individual M.P.s, often from Newfoundland, would get up in the House of Parliament and raise the question 'Why shouldn't fishermen be covered by unemployment insurance?''

By 1956 we had gained the support of most Members of Parliament from coastal constituencies in British Columbia for extending unemployment insurance coverage to fishermen. As it turned out we obtained the support of Jimmy Sinclair, the Minister of Fisheries. That year a few of us went to Ottawa again to lobby on that issue and were surprised to find that Sinclair was prepared to argue our case to his fellow members of cabinet. As a result a legislative amendment went through Parliament which deemed the fish companies to be the employers and classified the fishermen delivering to them as their employees for the purposes of unemployment Insurance coverage.

For whatever reason, the fish companies didn't oppose that amendment. But a year or two later the association representing the fish processors in B.C. concluded that they should have opposed it. Because they could foresee the time when there would be pension plans and certification of fishermen. Anytime you classify a group of producers as workers you're looking eventually at legislation which will give them some protection and benefits they haven't had till then.

On the matter of fish resources and regulation of the industry, the kinds of things the union has tackled, sometimes successfully and other times not, go far beyond anything most other unions have attempted. Other unions involved in the resource industries, such as logging, have had very little to say to date about how the forest lands should be controlled or what the cutting quotas and logging practices should be or anything which fundamentally effects their industry. And the same apples to unions in the other resource industries as well. Resource management is almost exclusively decided by the big companies, national and multinational, and their representatives in government.

One of the differences is that as fishermen we have been dealing with a resource which is not yet privatized to the extent that all the other 'public' resources are. Although there are increasing attempts to privatize fisheries resources the common law tradition that fish are a common resource has prevailed so far.

The UFAWU was the first organization in the fishing industry to decide that the sensible way to deal with the endless gear competition among fishermen was to establish some approximate allocation of salmon between the gillnetters and tollers and the seiners. At least in certain areas to start with. We constantly pushed the Department of Fisheries to set regulations which remove some of the senseless competition between gear. We did that mainly through lobbying, but when the union was stronger we weren't afraid of allocating some of the fish resources on our own if we had to.

We attempted that as far back as 1946. There was a major run of sockeye salmon headed for the Fraser, and we appealed to the International Salmon Commission to set an allocation between the seiners and the gillnetters. The Commission refused, saying that allocation of salmon had nothing to do with them; the Fisheries Department of Canada said more or less the same thing.
After a series of meetings among the various sections of the union, we decided that we could and would allocate the Fraser River sockeye ourselves if necessary. We looked at the recent catch of the gillnetters and seiners, calculated the percentage caught by each fleet, and estimated the proper division of the run between the two fleets. The seiners were to have the first crack at it.

Because of the big catch on the first day, we decided that the seiners wouldn't fish at all the next day. We had the seiners pretty well organized by then and they abided by the allocation we had set, regardless of any skipper or owner who wanted to keep on fishing. The seine boat crew members just said they weren't going to drop the nets.

The third day, after we had a better count of the catch, we opened it up again and the seiners fished until the end of the day, when they had what we estimated to be their share of the run. Then it was the gillnetters' turn to get their share in the river. When the final catch figures came in, it turned out that we managed to allocate the run to within four or five percent of what we decided was fair.

We did that again in the following year for the pink salmon run, and then we launched an ongoing campaign to compel the Department of Fisheries to establish regulations which would allocate the resource sensibly.

The UFAWU has within it a lot of competing interests which could threaten even the existence of the union. But knowing that, some fairly good practices were set up to deal with those potential stresses. It was accepted that the policies which the union pursued on fishing regulations would be thoroughly thrashed out first in our Standing Committee on Fisheries Regulations and then on the floor of the Annual Convention. The Standing Committee is composed of representatives of the various gear interests in the union and its purpose is to see to it that some compromise protecting those various interests is worked out.

Usually we are able to find policy positions acceptable to the various interests in the union and can approach the government on fisheries regulations with one voice. Where no mutually acceptable policy on specific fishing regulations can be arrived at the different groups in the union are free to pursue their own lobbying with the government without the union taking a stand one way or the other. Strangely enough, that has worked all through the years.

Our influence on the Department of Fisheries in regards fish allocations waxed and waned. We had some success in the fifties when Jimmy Sinclair was the minister of Fisheries but it has really been only since the late seventies that the federal government has come to manage the fisheries through gear allocations. They now set those parameters at the beginning of the season and most years the decisions which are taken at our Annual Convention having to do with a reasonable allocation of fish are close to what the Ministry of Fisheries set.

Union Work and Contract Negotiations

During the years I was Secretary-Treasurer the period following the annual convention found my plate full of resolutions which were more than I could handle at times.
was an assortment of resolutions having to do with all the problems which people faced in the industry. There were often a hundred or more resolutions having to do with fishery regulations which had to be dealt with. Some were items which had to be taken to the Minister of Fisheries and others which could be handled by the regional area director. They had to be presented in a formal way and then argued out afterwards, sometimes over and over for months.

For instance, there might be a union resolution having to do with the division of the catch coming out of the Adams River run between the seine fleet operating out of San Juan and the gillnet fishermen. We’d battle away on that, first with the area director and then with the Minister of Fisheries, trying to have our resolution embodied in the current fisheries regulations. We had to put continual pressure on the Minister to divide that run properly.

Intertwined with that were a host of other resolutions which had to do with wharfage and what was happening on the spawning grounds and what not. You name it- if it had to do with the fishing industry it sooner or later came up in the union resolutions. You had to try to figure out what you could possibly do to influence the situation to the benefit of fishermen.

Throughout the year there also were contract grievances to be dealt with. Contract conditions that you gain in negotiations and strikes have to be enforced constantly, to the best of your ability. They are constantly being challenged by the employers. There were always charges that somebody had been improperly fired or that a vessel owner was deducting a proportion of the crew shares for gear or whatnot. It seemed there was always more paperwork than I could handle.

Handling contract negotiations with the companies was one of the major tasks I had as secretary-treasurer of the union. In the final analysis the basic purpose of contract negotiations from a union's point of view is to try to determine what achievable gains can be made in wages for plant workers and tendermen, and in fish prices for fishermen. There is also the question of what gains can be made in working conditions, benefits, medical insurance and pension plans as well.

The contract negotiating committee is elected from the various locals and changes somewhat from year to year. A large local like Vancouver sends four or five representatives, the Prince Rupert and Steveston locals send a couple each and the rest of the locals send one representative apiece. If we get into a strike situation, the negotiating committee then operates as the Central Strike Committee for the duration of the strike.

You first have to get a clear picture of what the union membership needs and wants, which involves a series of meetings with the membership on a coast-wise basis. It means going around from one local to another holding meetings and bringing delegates together from all over the coast to hammer out a set of contract demands. Some fishermen may want an increase in sockeye prices but are not so concerned about pinks, while cannery workers may feel that the contract should concentrate on better benefits and not so much on wage rates. You take the contract demands back to the locals to make sure that you get the broadest possible majority behind a specific set of demands.
There also has to be consideration given to the overall economic health of the industry. Otherwise you might be going for something which was unrealistic. We would have researched things like the carry-over of salmon packs and frozen fish from one year to the next, the prices being paid on international and domestic markets as well as the costs of production in so far as fishermen are concerned. Once that is done you begin to narrow it down to what practical gains you think you can get from the companies. Only then do you begin bargaining-with the understanding that the companies' main purpose in bargaining is to avert any increase in costs so that they can maintain their profits.

Research alone was an enormous task. Bill Rigby did research for us a number of years, but we never had enough staff to delegate anybody to it full time. We used to contract the services of the Trade Union Research Bureau which Emile Bjarnson had set up; but there remained a good deal of the work left to us. Preparing statistical information in a way that the fishermen themselves could come to grips with. Information about the size of the salmon pack during the previous season, and the prices which different kinds of canned and frozen salmon were selling for in different markets. We tried to determine what percentage of the value of the marketed fish were going back to the fishermen and what the costs to the company were on the packers and in the shoreplants and so forth.

During my early years in collective bargaining we dealt mainly with senior officers of the fish companies who sat as representatives on the Salmon Canners' Operating Committee. They always claimed they had a better knowledge of the costs and markets than the union did and would never accept whatever figures you might present from government statistics or other sources. The bargaining and argument was quite sharp at times. They were hard bargainers but at the same time they could be read - you could tell when they were essentially fabricating or, alternately, when there was an element of truth in what they said.

Over time those company officers bowed out of contract negotiations and instead sent junior reps who had no authority of decide anything. While they made speeches about company costs and the equivalence of fish prices to other comparable food products on the market it was usually mere grandstanding. They might say anything and it could mean nothing. For anything that was binding they had to go to the senior company officers to get a decision. Occasionally there was a bit of fire, which would indicate some feedback, and the companies would bring in one of their major players. But there was less and less of that as time went on.

You couldn't let the negotiations run on too late in the season, or the companies might get their backs up sufficiently so that they'd be willing to forgo the balance of the season rather than pay any increases. If it seemed that a settlement couldn't be arrived at, the union bargaining committee had to decide when to take the company offer to the membership to vote on acceptance or rejection. The committee also had to set a strike deadline, if that was what our members decided.

As the situation came down to the wire you had to be assured you understood the feelings of the membership - not go too far beyond what they demanded but at the same
time give some positive leadership on whether there should be a settlement or if you actually went into a strike for how long it should last.

The decade after 1954 were difficult years in contract negotiations. We fought off some serious cuts in prices and in a few instances had to take a few steps backwards. The year which sticks in my mind most clearly is 1963.

The companies led off with massive price cuts for virtually all species of salmon but the most severe cut proposed was in the price of pinks. The previous year pinks had been about fourteen cents a pound, which the companies proposed to cut down to about eight cents. We took a strike vote and set a deadline to correspond to the main pink run entering into Rivers Inlet, which would be in the second or third week of July. Even though we got an overwhelming strike mandate the companies didn’t make any further offer to negotiate.

One of the central questions is “What does this offer mean in terms of earnings?” There may be a difference between the gillnet fleet, which based their livelihood primarily on sockeye and to a lesser extent on cohoes and chums, and the seiners who at that time based themselves primarily on pinks. If the companies slashed the price of pinks it was going to hit the seiners hard but not the gillnetters so much. The gillnetters might say, "If we lose our sockeye season over the price of pinks we can't make it up by trying to catch pinks," and so might not be enthusiastic in backing a strike.

The other major debate would be on the timing of the strike. That's always a key debate; trying to determine when to call the strike so that it effects all fishermen as equally as possible in terms of the loss they're going to take. It has to do with the timing of the various runs and the practices of the different kinds of fishermen.

For example, we might set the 20th of July as the strike deadline. At that time the Rivers Inlet run would be at its peak and the Skeena River runs should be coming to their peak. If the runs in the Fraser river are good that year the strike could involve the Fraser fleet too. But there are some years when July is a very poor month for the Fraser and the main run doesn't come in until August. To find the best timing so that every region bears an equal burden of the strike is difficult.

In 1963 it meant that the seine fishermen would take a major cut in their earnings during the strike but they might be able to make some of it up by concentrating on taking the pinks that came in through Juan de Fuca and Johnstone Straits later on. That's just a simplified example of the sorts of considerations involved in the timing of a strike.

Just as the strike was about to start the companies sent us a notice that they were prepared to pay the previous year’s price for sockeye but left the price of pinks at nine cents a pound. The way their offer was made, without any negotiations and on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, got all of us pretty hot. They expected to steam roller us into accepting that offer and were obviously counting on a split between the seiners and gillnetters.

A problem is if you have a strike situation pending in the middle of the fishing season you can’t get the entire negotiating committee together. Most of them are working fishermen and are out on the fishing grounds. So in this case only a little over a third of the whole negotiating committee was on hand to deal with the final company offer. But
those we'd contacted all expressed the same sentiment: not to accept that offer. There was a debate about that because there could have been some change in the membership's opinion since we'd held the previous vote. In the end we announced the final company offer to the membership but we didn't take it to a vote.

Within ten days that decision came back at us. Company spokesmen indignantly proclaimed that we had denied our membership their "democratic rights to decide on the company offer." To our surprise that view began to spread among our own members. So we went back to them with another ballot. While the membership did reject the company offer it was with a much reduced majority. Eventually we had to settle on a price for pinks which was no advance from where we were when the strike began. So it was a two week loss of fishing time with no real gains made.

After the fishing season was over we called a special conference to deal with the debates, rampant all over the coast, over the charge that we had attempted to deny the membership their rights to vote on the company offer. I considered that it had been a serious error on my part, knowing from past experience how these things can mushroom.

But when we admitted that it had been an error not to take the last company offer to a membership vote, those who were opposed to admitting that we had made a mistake almost appeared to be correct. Because some fishermen, especially those further upcoast, unloaded their frustrations on to the union leadership and talked as if our admission confirmed the stories about us trying to deny them their rights. But in the long haul the membership realized that we were saying, "O.K. we made a mistake. Now let's go on from there."

The companies thought they had us. The following year they thought they could declare a lockout and force us to accept an even poorer contract. But the membership responded overwhelmingly not to accept their offer. The companies tried their lockout for the first week of the run but found that it wasn't going to work. So we settled that year's contract with no further cuts and even a slight improvement in prices.

**Mass Participation**

The primary purpose of a trade union is to defend its members interests, economically and in other ways. In order to do that, the main thing is to see to it that you keep organized throughout the industry and that you are able to carry on effective price and wage negotiations with the employers and are ready and able to carry out an effective strike if necessary. That is the most fundamental task of any union's officers.

Of course no handful of union staff and officers can accomplish that by themselves. It depends on the work of the members of the negotiating committees and the General Executive Board and the commitment of the executives and activists of the locals all along the coast.

From its inception and continuing today, the UFAWU has always encouraged the broadest participation by its members that it could. You do that by encouraging members to involve themselves as boat delegates, to become active in the local executives or to become involved in any of the various committees we have to deal with the problems of
the industry - committees dealing with marine and river pollution or fisheries regulations or working conditions in the fish plants and so forth. It's always important to encourage discussion by members and have them take on something in their own backyards, something that really interests them or rankles them. There is always more work to be done than we ever had people to do it.

These processes are never perfect but the intent is to have as many of our members involved in the operation of the union as possible. As a result, factionalism is less of a problem in a union structured like ours, with active participation of all sectors in the industry, than it might be if it were a more centralized organization with decisions coming from the union executive.

Let's say you've got a local somewhere along the coast that gets it in its head that something ought to be done about one thing or another and goes steaming ahead on that. Well, they've got to convince members in the other sections of the union that it is something that ought to be and can be done. If it's something which would be detrimental or won't bear any fruit it will usually be shown up for what it is during debate in some committee or another. Those who are directly involved with a particular situation will usually have a clearer idea of what's entailed then the union leadership can. That's been my experience.

Not only that. If the union leadership were to decide most matters there'd be no experience gained by the active membership. Even if the leadership were right ninety percent of the time, if the membership got into the habit of just going along, saying 'Okay', they'd eventually develop an attitude that's opposite of what is needed. Instead of taking responsibility for the union themselves, they will come to say, "The union? Well that's that stupid bunch at the top." The union become "them" rather than "us".

I don't think that the UFAWU would have existed, certainly it wouldn't have had the clout that it had, if not for the rank and file members who fought the battles and got involved in the organizing and the day to day strengthening of the union. That applies to the boat delegates out on the fishing grounds, to the people who took up the work of the locals and in the area councils, to the shop stewards and women and men who did the work in getting and keeping the plants organized. They were all time consuming, unpaid positions filled by active members of the union. I did that myself before becoming a full time organizer and I'm doing it since leaving the presidency of the union to go fishing and am now a rank and file member myself.

Without that kind of participation it just can't be done. I don't think that there is any substitute for that rank and file participation in an industry like ours. In fact that is one of the arguments I'm still having with some of the officers of the UFAWU today; without getting rank and file committees together everywhere we'll continue to lose ground.

People who have been the most active members sometimes suffered burn-out over the long haul. Take boat delegates. When they came in they might only have a few days in port between trips and sometimes a fair part of their free time would be taken up in dealing with grievances, say of some guy who got short changed on his settlement or someone who got fired unjustly. I'll leave it to the reader's imagination; if a person has
been away to the Bering Sea for three weeks fishing for halibut, and comes in for a week or less between trips, and then spends a third of that time taking up someone else's problem, it can be pretty rough on his personal life. If that happens too often a guy may just throw up his hands and say, "That's it. Get someone else as a boat delegate."

But there are people who are willing to take that job on, year in and year out. Some of them had had experience of what can happen when you don't have an organization on the deck of a large boat. A skipper can replace crewmen as he likes and make up some excuse for it.

It was much the same thing among the shop stewards in the fish plants. The shoreworker shop stewards put in endless hours trying to straighten out questions of seniority - all the beefs which came up among our members, including some who were willing to take advantage of seniority when it was to their benefit but ready to forget about it when it didn't.

By and large there is only so much that people can take before they are ready to turn this kind of union work over to someone else. And that's reasonable enough. You've just got to make sure that there is someone ready and capable to take over from those people who've done the work for years.

There were hundreds of dedicated members, who came from so many locals and such varied backgrounds that one kind of hates to single any one person out. But a good example is Buck Suzuki. He had been a union activist amongst fishermen even before the the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union was formed. His history precedes mine a bit.

I first heard Buck Suzuki speak when he addressed a meeting of the B.C. Fishermen's Protective Association in Ladner a couple of years before the war in the Pacific started. He came to raise the question of the licence restrictions which applied to Japanese-Canadian fishermen in B.C. and not to anybody else. He was trying to persuade the B.C.F.P.A. to stop backing them.

Buck was raised in Sunbury, a fishing community up-river from us in North Delta. He was a gillnet fishermen on the Fraser as was his father before him. I'm not sure what Japanese fishermen's organization he was involved with or what debates went on within the more progressive elements of that community then. That may be a history which is lost now. I also don't exactly know what happened to his family during the internment during the war, but Buck joined the Canadian armed services and spent part of the war working as an interpreter with British Intelligence in Burma. He was quite badly wounded there; a nerve in his back was damaged which always gave him trouble afterward. It came and it went. For many years he managed to run a boat but that injury got worse and worse and finally made it impossible for him to fish.

I didn't really get to know Buck Suzuki until after the war. He was one of the first Japanese-Canadians to return to Vancouver and for a while worked around the waterfront there. At that time most Japanese-Canadians still hadn't gotten the right to return to the coast or enter fishing - so it must have been before 1948. The UFAWU had had meetings with the representatives of the Japanese-Canadian Citizens Association and I'd gone to the
JCCA convention in Kamloops. There we initialed a joint declaration supporting the return of Japanese-Canadians to the coast. We supported their right to reenter the fishing industry but hoped that they would join the union and not form separate organizations.

Soon after, Buck returned to fishing and became active in the union. He went around to fish camps in the area where he was raised, signing up other Japanese Canadian fishermen. It wasn't long before he was elected to the General Executive of the UFAWU by a large margin.

Over the years Buck did a tremendous amount of work on union committees. He concerned himself with just about everything which pertained to the gillnet fleet. He knew those issues intimately and over the years became a leading spokesman of not just the Japanese-Canadian fishermen but of all the gillnet fishermen. In the early fifties he was elected as union vice president representing the small boat fishermen.

Buck also probably did more than any single person, with the possible exception of Alex Eyton, in fighting for the environmental protection of the Fraser. The two of them together were almost inexhaustible in their efforts to get some controls over what was being dumped into the river. That branched out into a whole range of other issues having to do with the environment as it effects the salmon spawning areas throughout the province. Alongside all of that Buck continued working as a gillnet fishermen right up late 1967.

When Steve Stavenes and I were sent to jail for contempt of court in 1968 Buck became the acting president of the union and did a good job under quite difficult circumstances. As a working fisherman he hadn't had the overall experience of negotiating contracts and then seeing to it that they were enforced. So it was a pretty difficult thing.

He told me once how frustrated he got by the end of the day, handling the reams of correspondence which came into union headquarters and had to be answered. I told him I'd sometimes felt like grabbing all the paperwork and throwing it out the window and taking off to go fishing. But Buck did that job for the year we were in jail and held everything together.

One kind of hates to single out one person because there are hundreds that you know who deserve to have something said about them, for all they did. Reg Payne, Steve Stavens, Scotty Neish and so many more. But you can't mention them all.

A Cannery Gets Organized

The shoreworker organizers understood the problems of the plant workers first hand. They understood better than anyone how to deal with the intricate problems of seniority conditions and the history of grievances at particular plants. Alex Gordon and Tom Parkin knew the ins and outs of the plant contracts and conditions better than I ever did. While on organizing trips up the coast I and the fishermen's organizers spent most of our time dealing with the fish boats and the packers. We'd meet with the shop stewards in the plants mainly to see how things were going, although occasionally we'd try to deal with some particularly troublesome problem.
One of the few times I got directly involved in helping to organize a plant was in Port Hardy in the early sixties. Seafoods Products had built a new cannery there and it was a quite a task to get it organized. Our organizers had signed up a number of people in the Seafoods plant but the drive hadn't yet been able to reach beyond a minority of the workers. So I went up there at the beginning of the salmon season and decided to stay until we got the place organized.

When that plant first opened many of the workers travelled from other places on the coast to work there during the canning season and returned home afterward. But gradually most of them resettled around Port Hardy. There were quite a few Indian families who came over from Rivers and Smith inlets to work in the Seafoods plant; other people had come to Port Hardy to work in logging and mining and as their families grew, they provided a local labour force. Some of the workers at the Seafoods plant had come from other plants along the coast, which were already in the process of being shut down. But the majority of the crew had never worked in any fish plant before. There were a lot of young workers there.

It was pointless to try to hold a general organizational meeting at the start. Nobody in the plant was going to speak up until they got the feel of which way the thing was going. I didn't want those most ready to support us to expose themselves to the danger of being fired or harassed before the majority were signed up. So I simply talked to individuals, finding people who were willing to join and assuring them that we weren't going to release any names until we had a majority which could be certified and given the protection of the Labour Code. When I did come across those willing to help in that drive, I would get them to take application forms along to sign up others they knew were interested.

In most canneries women workers outnumbered men by about seventy percent to thirty percent. Sometimes the percentage of women was even higher. There'd usually be men employed around the steam cookers on the main floor. Taking the trays of cans out of the retorts and loading them on carts to haul away to the packing section was also done by men. But the washing and trimming lines, where the biggest part of the work force was, employed women exclusively. It was same on the can reform lines. All the gutting and slicing of fish and packing it into cans had been done by machinery since the early part of the century. But the machinery was never capable of cleaning fish perfectly so the final trimming was still done by hand.

A couple of women working in the plant were central in helping us get that operation organized. One was a woman by the name of Alice, but I can't remember her last name now. Another was a Native woman by the name of Scow, but I can't remember her first name. Both of them understood what was necessary right off the bat. Working with those two women in particular I was able to get the majority of the women workers in the plant signed up.

During two weeks of organizing I tried to talk to almost every person in the plant individually. The manager didn't chase me out because he didn't want to appear anti-union in the eyes of fishermen. The fishermen were members of our union and he wanted
to get some of their production away from the other canning companies. So he couldn't afford to alienate them too much.

The issue we talked up was not primarily wages. Seafoods Products had already stated that it would pay whatever wage rates were negotiated between the major companies and the union. The questions of seniority and job security became more important.

Some individuals would say to me, "What's the point of joining the union. The company is paying the union wage rates anyway." I'd say, "What union rates? They're not something you pull out of a hat, they don't come from nowhere. In order to get those rates there have been years and years of organizing and struggle; they've been achieved by people going out on strike to win those conditions we have in our contracts. All in order to establish the wages which your boss now says he's going to pay. Obviously, with an organizing campaign on now he'll be careful to settle any grievances. Just as long as we're here."

I'd say, "Supposing that some time in the future the company makes it's own interpretation of what you're due. What protection have you got then?" I'd say. Or, "What if you are fired unfairly or have some grievance with the company in the future. Who's going to go to bat for you if there's no union and you are on your own?"

Once I got into what the union contract did contain, I'd find that some individuals just didn't want to make a commitment. Sometimes the reaction was, "What about the rest of the people here. Have they joined or not?" In the early stage I'd have to say, "I don't know if they're going to join but I'm asking if you're going to join." I'd make a mental note to come back to that person again later to see if I could pin him down.

I might say, "Look. We haven't got a union in this plant and we're not going to be able to maintain conditions here unless there is a union certified. We'd like to have you in the union so that we can help protect these conditions, so that you can help protect your own job as well.

I pointed out how tough a job it was to get any sort of seniority rights from the companies and that the companies always wanted to keep rotating a proportion of their workers. That without a union the individual worker had absolutely no protection. That rung a bell because many of them either had that experience or knew somebody who'd not been called back when a cannery reopened for a season.

Quite often, for those who had never been in a union, I'd have to explain what seniority is and why it is so important. That those who have been employed the longest at the plant would have the first opportunity to come back after a layoff.

Some would disagree. They'd say "If somebody can do a job and is available why shouldn't the company be able to hire them regardless of who was there before?" If they were junior in the plant that might seem to be to their advantage. I'd point out that a situation like that was made to order for the boss. No one would have any protection without seniority rights. It would be the boss' exclusive right to decide who was going to work and who was not.

Seniority was one of the more difficult arguments to get into and yet it was vital. There were some who said they'd just as soon not have a seniority system. They might say that
they had applied to other places and had been told by personnel managers that if only the union didn't insist on seniority they'd hire them. "What if you'd put in twenty years with a company", I'd say, "and had them decide that they didn't want you anymore and they fired you and hired some one just out of school to take your place. Do you think that's fair? Do you want to work in a plant with that threat hanging over your own head?"

Some of those I talked to were people recently out of school and not interested in looking down the road and not willing to trust anything or anyone too much. So I'd have to deal with that. But I found that an appeal to fairness and simple justice worked quite well, particularly if you could put it on a first person basis. Point out what had happened to somebody in that plant or in one very much like it, and make it clear that that was the sort of thing that he or she might face themselves in the future. Where would they turn then? If they were going to ignore what happened to other workers were they willing to accept that happening to themselves in the future? In most cases that had an effect.

One unusual aspect in this particular cannery was that the hardest people to get organized were the men in the skilled jobs. It was a core of about a dozen to two dozen men in charge of the canning and reform lines, the retorts and the packaging operations. It took me a while to figure out why but I finally discovered that those in charge of the production lines had been promised bonuses if the plant remained unorganized. Because they were senior workers and many of them had been members of our union in the other places, I used stronger language with them. "Some kind of a deal's been cut between you and Cruikshank. Well if that's what you're out for you're going to get screwed because he isn't going to come across. We'll get this plant organized one way or the other. With or without you."

I said, "How can you face yourself when you look in the mirror. You've taken the benefits of the union all this time and now, to get something extra for yourselves, you're prepared to do Cruikshank's dirty work for him. You should be the ones helping to sign the crew up and here you are dragging your feet at every turn." I really went to town on them.

It didn't make supporters out of them but it neutralized their efforts to halt organization. And we made it. Once a certain corner was turned just about everybody in the plant joined up.

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Someone once asked me, 'No matter how much faith you have in the working class there must be people in any union who don't give a damn for their fellow workers. And how I would come to terms with that?'

I don't suppose you could deal with it properly unless you had some concept that they are the products of a capitalist society and that what you are ultimately working for is to bring about some change in society as a whole. Because if it were going to be that way forever, if a section or even the majority of the working class was going to be dominated by the outlook of the capitalist class forever, then what the hell were you working for.
You'd just go on being a hired prize fighter for the membership, some of whom had a
decent basic outlook but others who'd be dominated by the capitalist mentality.

Some of the worst elements I had to deal with were a certain kind of religious fanatic.
Not only were they ensnared in a dog-eat-dog mentality but also they looked upon most
of their fellow men with suspicion, attributing to them the worst possible traits up to and
including the suspicion that some of their fellow workers might be devils in disguise.
Particularly union organizers.

There were other individuals who were just opportunists. People who would take
advantage of everything the union could win for them but didn't want to contribute to it in
any way. Others who did join the union felt that it was like a vending machine, where you
drop your money in and expect something back immediately. And if you didn't or
couldn't bring back what they wanted then it was your fault or the fault of the union as a
whole. They were a minority in the union, to be sure.

What kept me at it was some understanding of how capitalist society operates, in
Canada and elsewhere. Some consideration of the forces in contention and the
consequences involved. That gave me a more philosophical approach, because otherwise it
could have been very depressing.

Some of the worst bastards I've found are the ones who know all this but still retain that
readiness to take advantage of their fellow man. When I first read Gorky's My
Universities it hit me like a ton of bricks. Here was a man living in a different world, in
different times, but with those same sorts of people who were ready to do anything,
including stone their neighbours. And yet out of that Gorky discerned the other, the better,
the indispensable attributes of the working class

You're asking, 'Did I have moments of depression?' Certainly I did. But it had less to do
with the actions of individuals than with the responses of larger groups of people.

The one time I had that feeling, that uprooted me so that I didn't know where I was at
was during 1957. I had been hammering away at the companies in contract negotiations,
taking the position that our members wouldn't stand for the kind of deal they were being
offered. But in the vote to accept or reject the companies' offer the membership voted to
accept it by a fair margin.

I thought,'This is impossible. Where the hell have I gone wrong in judging w hat the
membership were thinking? And why didn't they tell me?' I spent weeks worrying about
that.You may not understand that if you've never been in a position of leadership, the kind
of leadership which a union requires. It can be a shattering experience when you think
you know what the people you represent want you to do and then find that, obviously,
they don't want you to do that at all. It's not just a matter of a simple misjudgment. It's a
question of the reciprocity between you and the people you're working for.

When I went up the coast I couldn't find anyone who admitted they'd voted for the
settlement. It was almost like when the Social Credit government is elected. Everybody
says they voted against it and yet obviously a lot of workers had to vote for it for them to
get in.
Finally, midway up the coast, I ran across Ossie Ray, an old time Wobbly who just died a few years ago. He was born and raised in Ladner but fished all over the coast and lived on his boat wherever he happened to tie over. Since he was a lot older than me I always made a point of talking to him about developments.

"Well Ossie, what the hell happened?"

"Don't you realize you were sandbagged by your own membership and they're not going to admit it."

That's about the way I felt at the moment but he put it into words. He went further and said, "Homer, if I were you I'd resign."

Emotionally it was pretty tempting. But I also thought, 'Ossie, from what you've told me about your life there were so many times you started something and because it wasn't working out the way you wanted you quit.' Some years later Ossie quit the union over one disagreement or another yet he continued to support it until the day he died. So I don't think that kind of approach is of any benefit.
10.

A BIT ABOUT FAMILY LIFE

I first met my wife in the winter of '47 after I came back from the World Youth Festival. She was working for the I.W.A. and had seen me at various union functions and at party meetings. Sometime in December or January I got a phone call and this woman's voice said, "What are you doing this coming Saturday night?"

"Oh, I don't know. Anyone I can and the most willing ones twice, maybe." I didn't even know who I was talking to.

There was silence for a moment but then she asked if I could go out to Websters Corners on Saturday night to give a report and show a film about the World Youth Festival. "Well, yes that's alright." So I went out and addressed that meeting. When it was over I met Grace's family and they offered to put me up for the night because none of us had a car and it was a long trip back into Ladner.

As a result of that I made a date with Grace for the following weekend. After going out for three or four months we decided to get married. Yes, it was that sudden. It surprised my parents alright. My mother was worried that I had gotten myself into a situation where I had to get married. Mainly, she was concerned because she had never met this girl and didn't know who she was.

I hadn't been thinking about marriage but Grace and I hit it off, right off the bat. We seemed to be suited to each other physically and in every other way. She had a lot of attributes which I admired. Grace was very straightforward and we could spend hours in conversation that had some meaning. Although we didn't always agree she would recognize things which I wouldn't always see.

Grace was raised nine miles south of Shaunavon, in what became the dust bowl of Saskatchewan. Her family lost their farm and everything and had to leave in 1935. Grace was old enough to understand the tough times when they often didn't know if they'd have enough to eat. They finally managed to get a forty acre homestead close to the Finnish community at Websters Corners near Mission where Grace's father did a bit of farming along with fishing on the Fraser. Borkhild, Grace's mother fished with her husband at first and later ran her own gillnet boat. During the late thirties and early forties she fished with her own boat on the Fraser and even up in Rivers inlet. Certainly that was pretty unusual but Borkhild's maiden name was Olson and she came from a large family, some of whom were fishermen. She had spent part of her youth on the coast and wasn't entirely unaccustomed to fishing.

Grace and I never did live together before we were married, the way many younger people do now. Grace was then living at her aunt's place in Vancouver and I was living at my own aunt's place and I suppose we didn't consider living together partly because of family expectations. Had we lived together for a year or two first, as some couples did even then, our parents would have been hurt.
I probably was ready by then to settle down with someone. The other women I’d known were unwilling to hack the kind of life I had. That was one understanding which Grace and I came to before we decided to get married. I had made a commitment to my work in the union and I wasn't going to enter into a marriage where I'd have to worry about whether that was acceptable to my wife or not. Grace was strong enough and politically clear enough that she could handle that. I don't know what would have happened if she had said the opposite. Anyway, we got married on April 30, 1948.

Our first place was a rented room in Vancouver where we had to share the kitchen and bathroom. After being married about four months Grace became pregnant so we decided that we would try to find ourselves a house of our own. Some time early in the following year we got a place in Vancouver East near Exhibition Park, right next door to my aunt's place. By borrowing from my father and my uncles and from everybody else we could we managed to scrape together enough to put a down payment on it and lived there for five years.

Bruce was born in May of 1949 and John came along a year later. So our planning wasn't working all that well - we hadn't intended on having two in a row that fast. Nick arrived in 1952 when we were right in the middle of a tough strike situation. I was in the negotiations with the companies when a staff member came into the room and slipped me a note saying that I had a third son.

We decided at that point not to have any more children. That was going to be it. But after a couple of years Grace got the idea that she wanted to have a daughter. "Well, we're just as likely to have a another son the way we're going," I said. But Barbara came along in 1956.

Whenever we had any time together we were always either going out to Websters Corners or coming over to Ladner. Neither one of us really ever got accustomed to living in the city. I never got used to the fact that you couldn't just talk to your next door neighbour or drop in to visit them. Sometimes you’d meet somebody who was willing to be a neighbour but at other times it was as if you were imposing just to say good morning to them. Or so it seemed to us.

Moving back to Port Guichon involved having more space for the kids. Port Guichon and the area around it was still quite rural then, the suburbs didn't reach out to it until the last few years. We had a big lot and made a huge garden that could just about feed the whole family. Grace and I both loved gardening.

Most of my relatives and family were still living when we moved back out to Port Guichon. Having them around gave both Grace and me a sense of security over the years. Relations with your relatives and family aren't always smooth sailing but I always found it rewarding and a source of strength to have that.

I didn't have much free time, as far as my own family was concerned. I did a lot of travelling coast-wise and also across the country. During major contract negotiations or during the convention there were times when it wasn't feasible to come back from Vancouver each night, what with the ferry and all. Until well after Barbara was born it was difficult for me to spend much time with my kids. Grace more or less raised them on
her own. I would learn about one of the kids being sick or about problems they were having almost second hand it seemed. The problem was often already over when I heard about it.

Grace has had some difficult times, raising four kids with me only around part of the time for years. She had a rough time when I was in jail. But we came through that. Basically because of her own political outlook Grace never took the position that I should give up what I was doing. She was a tower of strength that way.

We were lucky in that the kids were all healthy. The only thing that happened in that regard, which scared the pants off me, was that Bruce got hit by a car when he was not quite five. An ice cream truck was parked across the road with a bunch of kids around it. I happened to be home, in the backyard, and heard the squeal of brakes. As I rushed out I saw a bunch of people gathered round and Bruce laying there. He had been eating an ice cream bar and there was a froth of white and brown substance coming out of his mouth. The thought raced through my mind that he had been hit in the midsection and might die. Somebody had already phoned the doctor and I picked him up and carried him to the house. After the doctor examined him for internal injuries and strapped some splints on his legs we rushed him to the hospital, where he stayed for over four months. I suppose that's not so unusual but it's the kind of experience you never forget as a parent.

We always tried to take a two week vacation together, pile into whatever old car we had and head up into the interior to go camping. If we couldn't get away we'd take the kids over to one of the islands across the river and camp out there. I'd borrow my father's boat and we'd go across on summer weekends. Later the boys all got involved in hockey and the big event every Sunday morning was to run them out to the hockey rink at the old Boundary Bay airport. But more often then not they were on their own.

I guess the thing that was most traumatic for them was my political activity. They had pressure put on them because of that - bits and pieces they've told me about since. But they seemed to face up to it pretty well. I think that my going to jail for contempt of court following the Prince Rupert strike was the worst experience for them. But they had a lot of support from the family so it wasn't as bad as it might have been under other circumstances.

When I was growing up, the way it was with fishing, you learned from your father or your older brothers and uncles. You picked it up from them. But by the time my sons were getting ready to fish my own uncles were were past that stage. The big difference was that I wasn't fishing when my sons came of an age.

My father kept running his packer into his late seventies, until he was physically incapable of doing it. He just didn't want to give it up. Finally me and my brother and my sister had to say to him, "You're past the stage when you can do these things anymore." He'd developed Parkinson's disease by then. Finally we had to go to him all together and tell him that he just wasn't capable of running the boat anymore. That was a painful and difficult thing to do. But even after that he never gave up the idea that he was going out fishing again.
When Bruce turned sixteen he asked if he could look around for a job on a fish boat. I said that he could put his name in at the union hall. The union rule is that the people who were out last season have priority in being called back the next season. I told him that he'd have to go around and look for a job but the boats from around Ladner were all pretty well crewed up from the year before. The fleet all sailed and he was left sitting here.

So about the third week in July he came to me and said, "Do you have to pay some kind of a penalty for being the son of the secretary-treasurer of the union?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, although I could guess what he was getting at.
"I've been waiting and waiting and have never even had a call. I know other kids my age who've had a chance to go out. Why am I stuck here?"

"Well you're learning the hard way. That's the way it is with most people who don't have pull with a boat owner. But have you really been serious in looking? Have you been down to Steveston early in the morning before the boats sail to see if anyone needs a replacement?" I'd been too busy at the office to know that.

As it turned out, the very next Saturday morning he got on with Gus Gunderson, who was a skipper on one of the Nelson Brothers seiners, just before the fleet went out to San Juan. Bruce managed to get out on other boats after that and did fairly well at seining once he had that first bit of experience.

John got some experience with his grandfather as a deckhand packing fish on the Fraser when he was sixteen and seventeen. He then got into seining through one of the local skippers and did that for quite a while. When Nick got to be that age he landed a job as a deckhand on a gillnet-troller. I tried to lay down the law that they all had to finish high school before they went fishing - I was always sorry that I hadn't completed my final year in school - but they all did graduate.

Barbara found her own way. She made one trip up the coast with me on the union boat when she was about fourteen or so. We went up as far as Sointula. Coming back at night I asked her to take the wheel for a while, thinking to get a short nap, and told her to wake me up if she saw any tugboat or steamer or net lights or anything that she wasn't sure of. Well, somehow I slept right through the night and woke up in the morning as we were down off Cape Lazo. What amazed me was that she took the boat all the way down through the lower part of Johnstone Strait, through Seymour Narrows and into the Gulf by herself. At that age, it was quite a thing.

It's sometimes difficult, as a parent, to keep in mind that your kids have different ways and a different timing of coming at things. Bruce had been out on the union boat with me when he was about fourteen too. We went from plant to plant along the coast and spent quite a bit of time around Namu and Rivers inlet. I was trying to organize a meeting of the shop steward committee in Namu and in the fish camps. The problem was to find a day when everybody would be able to come. A couple of times when we called a meeting hardly anyone turned up.

Near the end of the trip I asked Bruce,"Well. What do you think, now that you've seen me at it?"
He paused a bit and then said, "I've been watching what's happening and I think you must be one of the world's prize assholes."

I was taken aback but tried not to let on. "What do you mean by that?"
"You're worrying and trying to get people to go to meetings and they couldn't care less. You think they're interested but they're not."
"Well, they've got other things on their minds and people like a day off. This was just one of those times when things didn't work out." I tried to reason with him, but he just tuned out.
Later on, when he was sixteen or seventeen and had done some fishing himself, I asked him the same question again in a little different way but got virtually no response. It was more or less the same with John, though he wasn't as explosive about his feelings. He had his own ideas, right from childhood.

But Bruce eventually became very active in the union and was elected to the General Executive Board on his own ability and has done a lot of good work there. John is now secretary of the Ladner local and also secretary of the Fraser River Council as well as being active in the Fisheries Regulations committee of the union. Nick is active in the union to a degree. We've worked and fished together since I returned to fishing and we get on very well together.
11.

MEMORY LOG OF THE CENTRAL COAST

Passage on the Union Boat

The union had acquired a boat called the *Chiquita* for organizing purposes and during the fifties and sixties we made three trips a year up the coast. They would take from two and three and up to six weeks. With the diesel engine we installed she'd only do about eight knots so a trip up the coast was a fair voyage. Getting out on the organizing trips became the part of the union work I liked best.

Our first trip of the year would be prior to the annual convention in March. Alex Gordon or I would meet with the secretaries of the locals along the coast and hold membership meetings to find out what kinds of issues were coming up. We'd make another trip sometime between the first of May and the middle of June in order to deal with the contract negotiations for the season. A more purely organizational trip would take place sometimes between late July and the beginning of October. In between, the boat would be travelling around the coast with one or two of our full time organizers aboard.

The first port of call was either Powell River or Campbell River, depending which side of the Strait we wanted to visit first. When we stopped in Powell River we'd hold a meeting to discuss whatever issues seemed important to the local fishermen and then move on to Lund and the Yucultas. Although there wasn't a local there anymore we did have members living around Big Bay.

The next stop might be Alert Bay, where we usually spent three days or so dealing with an accumulation of grievances. Many of them had to do with the payment of crew shares, because there was a substantial seine fleet berthed in Alert Bay.

There were seineboat owners at Alert Bay who tried to slip in charges against the crew share which weren't allowable under the contract. For example, with the advent of the power block some of the boat owners tried to charge their crews for its use. Our contract stipulated that all equipment on the boat was to be provided by the owner and be paid out of the boat share.

Some of the most difficult cases to deal with were the Native seine boat owners there. At times these were boats which the companies had financed to the hilt. I remember having a real row with Jimmy Sewid, a well known native skipper from Alert Bay. A young native guy from Kingcombe inlet, who had previously worked in the woods, had gotten a job on a seineboat and was signing up in our union. That was straight forward enough because at the time we had a reciprocal arrangement with the I.W.A. where we accepted their members into the UFAWU without charging an initiation fee. It was a long standing practice which had grown up before my time and was continued. There were then still a fair number of people in these upcoast places who were both fishermen and loggers at different times of the year, or in alternate years. That was simply a fact of life.

Anyway, as I was signing up this guy Jimmy Sewid came along and wanted to know what I was trying to pull off. As well as being one of the prominent Native vessel owners
at Alert Bay he was a leading voice in the Native Brotherhood, which he thought should be the exclusive bargaining agent for all Indian workers no matter who they were or what they did. After both me and this Indian logger telling Sewid that it was none of his business I mentioned that the dispute over the sharing of the power block had been settled. The companies and the vessel owners association had agreed that it would come out of the boat's share. Sewid burst into a rage and said it didn't matter what agreements had been signed, he was going to charge his crew for the power block anyway.

He may have gotten away with that on his own boat for a year or two, we were never sure. We got the word around to the Native crewmen that under the contract they shouldn't be paying for any boat equipment. The problem was that these deductions were private arrangements made by some vessel owners and were kept secret. In order to contest that we'd have to find one or more Indian crew members who were not afraid of tackling a local vessel owner and willing to involve us in the matter. Since that might endanger their ability to land a berth in the future it was not something most of them were willing to do.

There were other kinds of grievances too, like people getting fired off seine boats. Those were usually sorted out in fall during the share settlement. The skipper's argument was always some variant of the crewman not performing his duties properly while the person fired would always argue that the skipper had just wanted to get rid of him to hire a friend or a relative. What we tried to do in these cases was to get a committee of local fishermen to process the grievance, to determine the facts and come to some tentative conclusions about what had happened.

There were times when you were left guessing about what had transpired after you had sifted through the statements, or lack of statements. Sometimes we were left wondering how to proceed and at other times we'd recognize that the man had brought it on himself and there was really no basis for the grievance. None of us would readily go into those kinds of grievances without having other fishermen from the area involved. Because it's too easy to be led down the garden path unless there is a committee present which has some knowledge of the particular boats and skippers.

If we did decide in favour of the crewman we would insist that the skipper take the person back. If he refused the union was strong enough at that time to stop the boat being handled by the packers. We'd bring him to settle that way. We'd get the crewman rehired and get his back pay for him or we'd dismiss his grievance.

From Alert Bay we generally went over to Sointula, which had mainly a gillnet and troll fleet. There was quite a different atmosphere around Sointula. Sointula had been established by a group of Finnish workers in the early part of the century. They had gone to Sointula, which was quite isolated then, with the intention of establishing a settlement where they hoped to be able to live in a kind of socialist community of their own making. It became a fair sized village.

The majority of the families there were fishermen or loggers or both. There would be upwards of a hundred fishing boats operating out of Sointula during the mid fifties. Although many of them would be elsewhere during the fishing season we had over a
hundred twenty five members in that local and when all of them turned out it seemed like most of the town at our meeting. In fact, the Sointula local had been one of the founding stones of the union which went on to create our UFAWU.

For a couple of generations the people at Sointula maintained their Finnish language and culture. Until the previous generation everyone there could speak both Finnish and English. And they maintained a quite high cultural standard too. Many of the fishermen there did a fair amount of reading and for a time the community produced a Finnish language newspaper. They held educational talks and performed plays in their community hall and tried to keep an arm's length from capitalist society as best they could.

There must have been a couple of hundred families in Sointula by the mid fifties. They were still mainly Finnish but there had been intermarriages as well. By the time I got to know the place there had been a split in the community between what they called the 'white block' and the 'red block,' which involved various disagreements other than political ones. That split ran pretty deep. Nevertheless, in terms of supporting the UFAWU they put most of their differences aside and maintained a good relationship with us.

From Sointula we would usually cross over to Port Hardy and work with the fleet that tied up there. By the early sixties the Seafoods Products cannery there needed some attention. From Port Hardy we'd run up to Rivers and Smith's inlets.

Rivers Inlet and North

When you're sailing across Queen Charlotte Sound, heading for Rivers Inlet, if it's clear you can see the mountains off in the background, snow cresting peaks falling off to the low lying islands. Cape Caution is the approach to Smith's inlet. If there's a westerly ground swell you can see South and North Island rocks breaking, with Egg island and it's lighthouse standing at the entrance to the inlet. But if you're coming in through low lying cloud and rain squalls, as was often the case, it could be a pretty hairy experience.

I find it difficult to put into words. But despite all the years I've been travelling up and down the coast, I still get a charge out of watching for all the different bits and pieces of the coast. It's not just as a matter of practical necessity to me. It's still a joy.

As you enter Rivers Inlet there's a big open bay on the starboard side and a low lying spit. If we could manage it we'd drop anchor there for a breather and go across the spit to dig a few clams or get some of the huge mussels that grew on the rocks there or maybe jig for a halibut for our supper. Then we'd continue up the Inlet, pass behind a group of small islands, make a turn through a narrow gut and come into Goose Bay with its cannery.

The main plant was a huge shed-like structure, part of it on land and part built out over the water on pilings. The first thing you'd look for was whether there was any smoke coming out of the stacks, whether the cannery was fired up or not. Wadhams, a famous old cannery further up the inlet, was closed by then but still had an operating net loft. The plant and houses were mouldering away, a kind of ghost town of the coast.

The three or four days of the week when the boats were out fishing we would spend our time around the plants in Rivers and Smith's inlets and on up to Namu or Butedale. On
the weekends when the fishermen were tied up we might go back into Rivers inlet, signing people up, discussing the contract and getting camp committees set up.

There must have been a dozen different locations in Rivers Inlet alone where gillnet fishermen tied up. Places like Dawson’s Landing, Duncanby Landing, Fin Bay, Beaver and Goose Bay canneries and others. Over in Smith’s inlet there was the old Boswell plant, which was then just a net loft, and Jones Cove and places like that where there were floats and space for the gillnet fishermen to do their net mending.

The canneries were fair-sized operations in comparison to other industries along the coast. Goodhope cannery then had something like a hundred workers, maybe a few more. Goose Bay cannery would be about the same. The cannery at Namu was by far the biggest in the region and had something like 400 people working there in the late fifties.

Then we had to contact the seine boats. They tended to be in ports like Namu and Klemtu or Butedale and Ocean Falls. We’d do whatever organizing had to be done among them and deal with whatever problems needed attending to. Sometimes we would be in meetings over grievances down at Goodhope cannery and had other meetings scheduled in Namu or Klemtu. So we were constantly on the go, back and forth.

But there were grievances at those isolated canneries which we never did get straightened out. One was over the cabins used by the seasonal Indian cannery workers. There was no running water and no toilets inside these cannery houses and it was in a constant battle to try to get those conditions improved even somewhat. The local cannery managers didn’t have the authority to put money into housing. The companies were planning to shut down those plants in the near future and they didn’t want to invest anything they didn’t have to. It wasn’t just the housing that was going to pot, the condition of these canneries as a whole was deteriorating.

We brought as much pressure to bear as we could. The next year there might be a little improvement but the main problems were still there. So in most cases we never did make much headway in improving the living facilities.

There were questions of safety conditions in the plants too. But we managed through the shop stewards committees to impose the safety conditions we thought were essential. The biggest single safety problem we had in those plants was with the ice augers, which were supposed to be covered over with a grill. But we had some really bad, some fatal, accidents with them.

We’d try to get Workers’ Compensation inspectors to come out and check up and there was also a constant effort to install safety procedures on the job among our members too. Because there were times when protective grills would be removed by somebody in order to get at a blockage and then not replaced and someone else would then work around the auger.

The local shop stewards had the authority in our constitution to enforce contract agreements and working conditions in a plant. The shop stewards committee would ask for a meeting with the manager during working hours - the whole committee of possibly ten shop stewards would go in. That meant that all those people were off the job while
they were processing grievances. If that kind of persuasion wasn't effective they could ultimately call the plant out on a short work stoppage.

The problem in places like in Rivers Inlet was that our stewards often didn't feel secure enough to do that. It was a very short season and people wanted to get every day of work in. Besides that, there was always some turnover from year to year. People would leave one particular plant to take a job in another closer to home or one which looked like it wouldn't be shut down in the immediate future.

So quite often there would be a pile-up of grievances in a particular plant. The local shop stewards had more confidence if they had a full time union organizer to go in to management with them, someone who understood the details of the contract better and had experience with similar grievances, not only in that plant but elsewhere on the coast.

There were Chinese cannery workers at Goose Bay and also some Japanese-Canadian women who came up from Steveston to work there. There were also white workers from Sointula and Vancouver Island and others from the lower mainland. They all lived in bunkhouses around the cannery. The Indian cannery workers, mainly women, generally lived in the cannery houses. They came from various places along the coast. Virtually all the people working in the canneries of Rivers Inlet would come in for the short season and then leave.

Different processes operated at the same time in these canneries. A certain camaraderie would develop amongst some people working in and living around an isolated plant for the season, having left their homes and friends behind and sometimes coming back to the same cannery year after year. But there was also a lot of antagonism and ethnic sectionalism. That was true even between the Indians coming from different villages and tribal groups; there would be strains of animosity and competition even between them.

Some of the companies still used a kind of Tyee system. You don't hear the term anymore but it was once quite widely known. They'd have an Indian person acting as their recruiting agent in one or a number of Indian villages. He was a kind of labour contractor for the cannery. A similar thing applied among the Chinese workers. Where the canneries had that Tyee or China Boss system it was quite an effective method of labour discipline and of keeping those workers removed from the influence of the union.

At one time in the industry the Chinese labour contractor contracted the job at so much a case of salmon packed. He tendered a bid that would get him the contract and still allow him to make a profit. He'd provide the labour for some part of the cannery operations at so much a case and would arrange the wages with whoever he hired. That had ended before my time but there was a carry-over at some places, like in Goose Bay cannery. The Chinese crews were still hired through a Chinese contractor who had his own agent working among the crew.

The union had originally signed a 'Chinese supplement' to the contract agreements with some canneries. That was done in the very early years of the union in order to get the first contracts from the companies. The wage rates weren't equal and some other conditions weren't the same as those covered by the general contract. While we signed these contracts with the companies we also started, almost immediately, to try to incorporate the
Chinese workers into the general contract. Meanwhile the Chinese labor contractor worked within the framework of the contract. The understanding among the Chinese who were hired in the cannery was that any problem between them and the company wasn't to go through the union but through the Chinese contractor. He would settle any grievances or questions of seniority.

The same thing had been true in many of the Indian villages. The question of who was going to get back to work was determined by the company's Indian recruiter there. That was the Tyee. They had a lot of influence through their ability to offer jobs, or not.

That was breaking down but it still existed at the end of the fifties. It was only after people had gotten a job at a plant that they joined the union. But once they had worked in an organized plant and learned that under the union contract they had a right to come back next year, a right which couldn't be taken away from them by the company or a contractor, then that Tyee system began to break down.

The historic background to this was that the companies had had a free hand in hiring and firing who they wanted, when they wanted and for whatever reason they wanted. They resisted the union's attempts to limit their free hand by all possible means.

If there had been a permanent work force I think the whole matter would have been cleared up in a couple of years. But the fact was that most cannery workers worked in these plants for only six weeks to three months in a year. Then they scattered back home to villages and towns along the coast.

I remember going into Klemtu during an organizing trip in the mid fifties. The plant was owned by the J.H. Todd Company, which was one of the oldest canning companies on the coast. It was all bunkhouse accommodation except for the permanent Indian village there. There were a few houses for the managers' families but all the cannery workers lived in bunkhouses. There were separate quarters for the Indian workers and fishermen who came over from Hartley Bay and from other parts of the coast. They were sometimes at loggerheads with the people who lived in the Indian village at Klemtu. There was also a small crew of Chinese cannery workers working under a contractor, who had their own bunkhouse.

We had already organized the cannery and had the majority covered by contract but there were still a lot of gaps. When I got there I found that the secretary of our local had fallen into a pattern of dealing with the various groups separately - mainly because that was the accepted procedure. He'd hold a meeting over in the village for members from the local Indian community and then he'd hold another one for the white workers living in the bunkhouses. He might hold a third meeting for the Indians that came from Hartley Bay for the season. There was no semblance of a single union organization there.

When I asked him what he thought he was doing he said that it was impossible to hold a general membership meeting because one group or another were sure to stay away. I camped in Klemtu for ten days and after a lot of running back and forth managed to pull together two more or less general membership meetings. Except for the Chinese, who wouldn't come out to a meeting at all.
There was an ingrained suspicion on the part of many Chinese cannery workers. There was also the language problem. A lot of the older Chinese workers really didn't understand much English so we had to work through interpreters, if we could find a younger person on the job who was willing to do that. There was always the suspicion and fear, you could almost feel it, that maybe it would create a problem for them in getting rehired.

I managed to get myself invited up to their quarters for supper and during the course of the meal and the discussion that followed they agreed to hold a meeting amongst themselves as to whether they would join the union. Which they finally did. But they still wanted to have their meetings separately, because they wanted to be able to talk things through on their own.

So, it was a battle to make those resolutions about unity which were passed in our Annual Convention work on the grass roots level. Sometimes things which looked straightforward on paper weren't all that feasible on the ground.

One of the problems in the upcoast canneries which occurred almost every year as they were starting up again was the company's resistance to rehiring by seniority. For a long time there was more than one seniority list. We had seniority lists which applied to women workers, another for men and a different one which applied to Chinese workers. Among Indian workers there was a contest between the Indian villages for the jobs available.

Take the case of Klemtu. Of a hundred jobs held by Indian workers in the cannery the issue might be whether fifty should go to people from Klemtu, twenty five to those from Hartley Bay and the other twenty five to those from Kitimat. That was the way in which hiring had been done in the past, whereas rehiring under a seniority system was determined by who had been working at that plant the longest. The other recurrent problem was how the available cannery houses were going to be distributed to the seasonal workers who came in. There were all sorts of problems of that kind for the shop stewards to try to straighten out.

Probably the best shop steward we ever had in Kemtu was a local woman by the name of Maryann Mason. Maryann was able to discuss the basic principles of seniority with her own people and drive home the point that we either had a seniority system that recognized the rights of everyone or we fell back on relying on the boss' favouritism. She was influential in her own community but could also deal with the Indian workers who came in from Hartley Bay and Bella Bella and elsewhere. She would meet and discuss with the representatives of those particular groups, getting them to work together rather than at cross purposes.

So, coming back to how people working in these plants got on together. There was a certain camaraderie which built up between those who got to know each other. But there were also conflicts which had to be wrestled with all the time. These conflicts were often phrased in sectional terms but they fundamentally had to do with threats to people's economic livelihood. To their jobs. And at times that couldn't be resolved.
Initially there was a separate contract clause and separate seniority lists for the women shoreworkers. At first the wage rates were different for women shoreworkers and for men doing more or less comparable jobs. The union didn't establish those differences - the companies did. We didn't eliminate that overnight but only through many years of negotiations.

I'm trying to remember the year we won a unified contract that gave us 'equal pay for equal work', so to speak. I think it was in the late sixties that we were able to merge the separate seniority lists into one. It was a major undertaking. Really, there should be only one seniority list which covers the plant. The only distinctions which can be justified are of job capabilities. You can't have a single seniority list which encompassed all the jobs in a plant regardless of skills. You couldn't have a person come off the washing line and take over running the canning machinery for example, even if he or she had the highest seniority. It took five years to become a journeyman in some jobs. So you had to have the seniority list qualified by the kinds of jobs that people were capable of doing

There were endless struggles to get the seniority systems all wrapped up in one - which was difficult enough to do in one cannery. We never did fully accomplish a unified seniority system between different canneries, even among those owned by the same company.

But we were faced with a much more serious problem. That was the layoffs and plant shutdowns which began to gather steam by the late fifties and early sixties. So we were fighting all that. We were trying to get equal pay for equal work, we were trying to merge seniority lists in the plants, we were trying to improve wage and living conditions and we were faced with severe reductions in the work force - all at the same time.

The numbers of jobs in the canneries everywhere on the central and north coast were declining drastically. If I remember correctly, the work force in the shore plants declined from around seven and a half thousand people to around four thousand between the early fifties and the middle sixties. For those working in the industry and living in the communities scattered along the coast it was a staggering blow.

For instance, the cannery at Namu had employed some four hundred people in the late fifties. The cannery burned down and they built a new one in its place. In modernizing the plant the work force dropped from four hundred to about a hundred and seventy workers. In their packaging department, where they previously had employed about seventy people, they needed only about a half dozen after automation.

Trying to operate an equitable seniority system under those conditions even in the framework of one company is very difficult. For example, B.C. Packers were cutting back in Namu and on the Skeena and handling that production with expanded facilities in Steveston and in Prince Rupert. We managed to get some people's seniority accepted at other plants but there was strong opposition to it, from workers in those plants as well as from management. The argument was that seniority originally had been applicable only within a given plant.

Even more difficult was the situation where entire companies went out of existence, as when J.H.Todd was bought up by Canadian Fish. And the same happened to the Anglo-
British Columbia Company and to Nelson Brothers. You were trying to preserve the seniority rights of workers in plants which no longer operated and from companies which no longer existed. We managed to retain the jobs of some senior workers but there were many others who we just couldn't do anything for. The jobs just didn't exist in the industry anymore. It was a tragic period for many.

There is a long history of new canneries opening and older ones being abandoned along the coast, but from the late fifties and throughout the sixties it became a one-way street with one after another of the upcoast canneries being shut down. We used to make the run on the union boat up into the Skeena because at the time there were still a number of canneries operating outside of Prince Rupert. There was Sunnyside cannery, at the head of the slough, and the next one over was Cassiar. Inverness cannery was already shut down but still maintained a net loft. There was the North Pacific cannery, which was operated by Canadian Fish and Port Edward cannery of Nelson Brothers. There had been canneries on the other side of the Skeena too, like Carlisle.

There's no longer a cannery at Port Edward. There's only a handful of pilings where Inverness cannery used to be. Sunnyside, which was one of the biggest plants in the region, shut down and is mouldering away. As of today (1987), out of all the canneries along the Skeena only Cassiar is still operating and it may close in the near future. Because the Cassiar Packing Company went broke and its assets were turned over to a receiver.

The cannery at Klemtu shut down in 1963, was reopened later to run a couple of seasons and finally closed. We went up and talked to the Indian people at Klemtu and they were pretty down hearted. Along with the plant went the jobs on the company fish boats and the packers. When J.H. Todd pulled out of Klemtu they dismantled everything and went so far as to tear out the main waterline, which served the entire community. That really angered the Klemtu people. After all the years that J.H. Todd had made profits there, to finally act in so contemptuous a way to the community.

So the worst that could have happened did happen. A great many people at Klemtu became unemployed and never had a job for years afterwards.

Maryann Mason's experience was pretty typical. She is in my age bracket and after the cannery closed down she had a difficult time. Her husband was a fisherman but his health had turned poor and he couldn't get out on the boats, none of which were based in Klemtu anymore. They were still raising their kids and Maryann got into making curios for sale, beadwork and things of that kind, until she got a job in the band office many years later.

Most of the women at Klemtu were in the same boat. They had been dependant on jobs in the cannery; there was no other employment in the area. So when the plant went down, unless they moved out completely they just had to go on welfare. Some of the men were able to get on fish boats elsewhere but not many. It was a very tough time for the people of Klemtu. It was a tragic period for many - the jobs just didn't exist in the industry any more.
From what I’ve read and heard, Indian fishermen here in B.C. participated in the very first unions and strikes in the industry. They played an important part in some of the big battles with the canners that took place on the Fraser at the beginning of the century. That was also true in certain places upcoast during a somewhat later period. But a broader involvement in unions seems to have fallen by the wayside during the following decades and fishermen's organizations everywhere became very sectional. That was the situation which existed when I first started fishing.

Native Indian fishermen did participate in some of the organizational battles of the thirties and in fact I think the effective basis of the Native Brotherhood was born out of certain divisions which arose during the Rivers Inlet strike in 1936. It was after that that the Brotherhood began to organize Indian fishermen themselves. But for a long time there was a close working relationship between the Brotherhood and the union, with Indian fishermen and shoreworkers belonging to and being active in both organizations. There didn’t seem to be any contradiction between the two in most people's minds.

Some of the first discussions between the United Fishermen's Federal Union and the Native Brotherhood took place prior to my becoming active in the union. The UFFU proposed that it should act as the bargaining agent of all of the various groups engaged in the fishing industry while the Brotherhood would concentrate on all those issues directly effecting the Indian communities. But the Brotherhood leadership held that they wanted to participate directly in contract negotiations with the companies. So the union adopted a policy of having the Brotherhood officers participate in negotiations alongside ours in contract negotiations.

For many years we exchanged fraternal delegates at our annual conventions. The first convention of the Native Brotherhood that I attended as a representative of the UFAWU was in 1948 at Bella Coola. They followed the practice of having a spokesman from the fishermen's union, in that case myself, relate some of the recent developments in the industry and what we saw arising in the coming year. But they also invited a representative of the Salmon Canners Operating Committee, who put forward the company line.

During those years the Brotherhood membership's acceptance of the union was relatively good. We had taken up a whole range of issues having to do with discrimination against Indians on the floats and in the bunkhouses and in the work force. We had supported their demands for complete legal and social equality and the works. That's a matter of record. But even then there were some leaders of the Brotherhood who would liked to have cut every tie with the union, banished any contact with us among
Native fishermen. They did everything to portray the union as something foreign to Indians, although things didn't go their way at first.

The first indication that we might have real difficulties with the Native Brotherhood came during the salmon strike of 1952. During negotiations for sockeye prices in July we had to settle for less than what we should have gotten, basically because there was a split in the vote. We had gone to the membership with a recommendation to reject the companies' offer, seeing that it was a price cut of three cents a pound from the year before. When the ballot was counted we found that the vote amongst the Native Brotherhood fishermen had been drastically different from the overall ballot. The votes were tallied by organization. Instead of having a seventy or seventy-five percent vote for rejection, which was the case in the union vote, the overall ballot was something just over fifty percent. The Brotherhood leadership took the position that they didn't have a strike mandate from their membership. There was a little arguing about that but it didn't come to a head during the summer.

The Salmon Canners Operating Committee then announced a massive cut in the price paid for Chum salmon. They intended to cut the price of fall Chums by almost a half. A wave of anger swept through the salmon fishermen along the coast. Even before we could hold a strike vote the fleet pulled up anchor and sailed down to Vancouver or to their home ports.

We held a meeting at the Pender Auditorium in Vancouver and it was just packed to the rafters. I was somewhat concerned that they'd just pulled the pin without an official strike vote and thought that might get us into some difficulty later. But everyone was just steaming mad and said that there was no way they were going to fish on those terms. When we held the vote we got the most powerful strike mandate I have ever seen. The strike was solid.

We had been negotiating with the companies for some two weeks when, on September 22, they blandly announced that they had met the previous day with representatives of the Native Brotherhood who had signed a contract to go fishing chums at the company price. They gave us the option to sign the same contract. If we didn't they intended to send their own boats out, those which were manned by members of the Native Brotherhood. That was mainly a cannery fleet although there were also boats owned by Native Brotherhood vessel owners, many of them heavily financed by the canneries.

Whatever we should have known or might have guessed, the companies' declaration that the Native Brotherhood had settled on their own and were going out to fish came as a complete surprise to us. There was no indication that there had even been any meetings held among the rank and file of the Native Brotherhood up the coast on that issue. We had Indian union members in a number of places who also belonged the Brotherhood. So it just didn't seem reasonable that we wouldn't have heard something about discussions that the Native Brotherhood might have had with native fishermen about accepting the company offer.

There was another huge meeting of fishermen and the question people were asking was, "How did this come about?"
Art Grant, who was a native fisherman originally from Kitimat who was working aboard a seiner, asked for the floor and addressed the meeting. He said, "There is no record anywhere of meetings held where this contract was ratified by native fishermen. There were four officers of the Native Brotherhood who negotiated and signed that agreement - Guy Williams, Ed Nahane, Bill Scow and Dan Assu. If those four can get together on a seineboat then maybe they'll have an operation going. But this contract they signed doesn't mean a thing because it doesn't have the support of Indian fishermen." That was greeted by prolonged applause.

At the time I wasn't so sure what the case might be but that was about the way it turned out. The Indian fishermen of both organizations, the union and the Brotherhood, responded by saying, in effect that the contract was signed by the Native Brotherhood leaders behind their backs and without their consent. There were no cases where Indian fishermen went fishing for the companies. There were a few incidents later on, some of which actually involved food fishing. But in the first blush, when we expected that were might be a real break away, it just didn't materialize.

The fishery remained solidly shut down into mid October, when the strike was finally settled. It was a long strike and amounted to losing half of the season. By the time the settlement was reached we were well into coho fishing. But the strike was a benchmark of the union's strength, which hadn't been tested in that way before. There was a question whether we could survive an extended strike. And we did. It didn't weaken the union.

In the aftermath of the 1952 strike a lot of Indian fishermen joined our union. Many were fed up with the role the Native Brotherhood leadership had played. Over a number of years we formed new locals among Indian fishermen and shoreworkers. We established locals at Port Simpson and in Kitkatla. At Kincolith a small group of Indian fishermen who were in the union grew into a local. We formed locals in places like Bella Bella and on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, places where we'd never had locals before. Tofino and Ucluelet came in. We even had the beginnings of a local in Nootka, despite its small population.

So the leaders of the Native Brotherhood didn't leave that strike with a heightened level of support among Indian fishermen. There was a full year in which there was no relationship between the Native Brotherhood and our union. They used that period to do everything they could in the villages to malign the union. But without real success at first.

It seemed to me that the underlying problem with the Native Brotherhood was that the owners of the larger fishing vessels dominated many of their communities through control of jobs on their boats. The fact that the Native vessel owners were major participants in the decisions made by Native Brotherhood when it conducted its discussions about contracts and fish prices meant that Indian fishermen came more completely under the control of the companies than any other group. The seine boats were privately owned by Native vessel owners but most of them were heavily financed by the canneries they delivered their catch to.

When relations were reestablished between the Native Brotherhood and the UFAWU I held that it was a mistake on our part to accept the relationship back in the way it was.
There was a proposal that Native vessel owners be excluded when we sat down with Native Brotherhood delegates in future contract negotiations with the companies. But the Brotherhood spokesmen said 'No' to that. 'It wasn't the Indian way' they said. So we eventually agreed that they could send whomever they pleased to our joint negotiations with the companies. In retrospect, I think that only allowed the Native vessel owners to consolidate their influence in the Native Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood's major areas of strength varied. At one time the overwhelming majority of Indian fishermen in the North were members of the Native Brotherhood. We didn't have locals there although there were members of the union scattered through many of those communities. On the Central Coast, there seemed to be a substantial organization of the Native Brotherhood in villages like Hartley Bay and Bella Bella. Although there were also Indian fishermen and shoreworkers in those places who belonged to the UFAWU.

When we went into the villages on the Nass and the upper Skeena to hold meetings with our members there we'd first talk with the chief and councilors and let them know what we were doing. If they wanted, we'd hold union meetings open to any member of the community so there'd be no feeling that it was some kind of secret discussion. That was usually acceptable. But in other places local leaders did their best to see that any effort to explain the union's position was boycotted. And still we established locals in places like Kitkatla and Kincolith, at Skidegate and Masset, at Port Simpson and Bella Bella and other places along the coast.

When people at Port Simpson wanted to establish a union local I went up to meet with them. I had already been warned by certain leaders of the Native Brotherhood that under no circumstances was I to attempt to set up a union local in Port Simpson. It was "Native Brotherhood territory", they said, and told their people, "You can't serve two masters". They meant that Native people had to belong to the Native Brotherhood and support its policies and programs right down the line.

I argued the opposite, saying that the labor movement would be a strong ally in their fight for equality. That there was no contradiction in belonging to the Native Brotherhood and to the UFAWU at the same time. And for many years a lot of Native fishermen and shoreworkers did precisely that, they maintained membership in both organizations. They looked upon the Brotherhood as the organization which would further their aims in the legislative and political field and the union as the organization which would represent them in collective bargaining in the industry.

Despite opposition from the Native Brotherhood we did set up a local at Port Simpson. The local was established and functioned quite well for many years.

On the central coast, there was a concentration of Native Brotherhood members in villages like Hartley Bay, Bella Bella and Klemtu, although there also were Indian fishermen and shoreworkers in those places that belonged to the UFAWU. There was no cannery at Bella Bella but native people from there went over to Namu to work during the canning season. Large numbers of them joined the union and some were elected to the shop steward committees on the job. Those shop stewards would continue dealing with
work grievances in their home community over the winter so we eventually set up a local at Bella Bella and had strong support there for many years.

When dealing with grievances which had arisen during the previous season or when preparing for the following year's contract negotiations, I had to go to Bella Bella to meet with our members. And there again I was challenged at the dock and told that I was walking on Native Brotherhood 'territory'. That I wasn't to come there to hold a meeting of union shoreworkers to discuss grievances they had with the cannery. I did anyway of course.

At Namu itself the work force was comprised of people who came from a number of Native communities along the coast. I remember an incident at Namu during the mid sixties which said something to me about how serious the Brotherhood's officers were in standing up for the rights of native workers. We were told by Indian women cannery workers, and some of the men, that a particular R.C.M.P. constable was acting as a law unto himself. He'd clamber aboard fish boats and storm into people's bunkhouse rooms and search their belongings if he thought liquor was being consumed. I and Harold Wilcox, one of our organizers, followed this constable on his tour around Namu one night and witnessed him strongarming an Indian fisherman who had had a few alright but who was by then bedded down on his own boat.

We got hold of Harry Rankin and in court attempted to raise the issue of how this Mountie had been behaving toward Indian people working at Namu. It turned out we didn't have a ghost of a chance because the presiding magistrate simply dismissed our testimony and held it to be prejudiced because it was brought out that we had been talking to some of the Indian workers about this situation before hand.

But what sticks in my memory is that Frank Calder, who was then one of the major spokesmen of the Native Brotherhood, was in Namu at the time working in the offices of B.C. Packers. At no time did he protest what was happening to Native people there. Yet he was one of those who proposed setting up a separate bargaining agency for all Indians employed in British Columbia. This agency was supposed to take over the contract bargaining for Indian workers in the province regardless of whether they were in fishing, logging, construction or anything else. It sounded like it was going to be the Tyee system on a provincial scale. But it never got off the ground.

When I first met Frank Calder, it must have been some time in the early fifties, he was one of the more progressive people in the Native Brotherhood. Certainly he understood a lot of the issues better than the average member did. I don't know the details of his political role in the Brotherhood but he certainly wasn't among the more rabid super-nationalists which existed in their ranks. But Frank changed over the years. He moved from being the C.C.F. M.L.A. representing Atlin to finally crossing the floor to become a member of the Social Credit government. By that time he had become discredited even among many of his own people.

Support for the union within the coastal Indian communities waxed and it waned. There were situations like on the Queen Charlottes, where we had established a local at Skidegate. Although the bulk of the local membership lived in the Indian village we had a
few non-native fishermen living at Queen Charlotte City too. Some white fishermen lived on the edge of the Skidegate Mission while others who were Native lived in the mainly white village. To maintain a working unity among them wasn't always easy. But for a long while we did succeed.

In Masset, there was a crab and clam cannery which also did some salmon processing. Virtually all of the Native shoreworkers there were in the UFAWU. In 1964 a strike occurred there which didn't develop out of wage negotiations or anything that had to do with the contract. It started as the result of a serious accident which occurred when some Indian cannery workers were being trucked from the village of Haida to the the cannery at Masset. The story was that the driver of the truck, a superintendent in the plant and a white man, had been teasing one of the women riding in the cab and by not watching where he was going had run off the road. One passenger was killed and a number of the women workers were badly injured.

When the matter came to court it turned out that he didn't have a licence to drive a crummy and that the company had no operating permit for that kind of passenger vehicle. The sentence imposed by the magistrate was a fine of something like two hundred and fifty dollars. There was deep resentment about that in the community.

The following year just before the canning season started, the Indian workers at the plant said that they weren't going back until that superintendent was removed. They just weren't going to work with him. The company refused to remove him, so the people in the plant went on strike. Some people claimed that the Haida wanted this superintendent out because he was a white man but essentially it wasn't that. No matter who he was they would have wanted him out. The UFAWU supported the decision of the people in Masset throughout the course of that strike, which lasted something like five or six weeks before they won that battle.

Phyllis Bedard was a daughter of one of the Haida chiefs and a leader among the women workers in the cannery. She took over the leadership of the strike in 1964 and was a major figure in that struggle, along with Ethel Jones and William Matthews, who weren't workers in the plant themselves but were leaders in the Indian community. They were able to win that battle and later maintained a very effective shop steward committee which took on every aspect of running a local and taking up grievances in the plant.

During the course of that strike the Native Brotherhood sent some of their officers into Masset and tried to persuade the people there to call it off. The Masset people rejected that out of hand and for a long time after there was virtually no connection between them and the Native Brotherhood. In the years since, however, that relationship has been restored.

When I think of some of the Indian fishermen who have been strong union people I think of people like Allen Newman from Bella Bella, who operated a gillnetter and actively participated in union work for a long time in that area. Perhaps Ivan Adams, more than
Ivan had done just about every kind of fishing on the coast, gillnetting and seining and what have you. He'd been in the armed forces in World War Two and after he returned he moved from Masset into Prince Rupert. He and his wife Connie were both very staunch union members and Ivan attended many of our conventions as a delegate from his local. In debate about questions in the fishing industry he had a good grasp of how working people and minority groups, Indians in particular, could and should work together.

During the strike in Prince Rupert in '67 Ivan was down at the union hall almost every day, and often into night, helping out with whatever problem came up. For much of his life he was an important spokesman for the Indian community, even though there had been a lot of attacks on him by certain misleaders of the Indian people. But he was in the forefront of a lot of the struggles which took place.

Ernie Jackson was someone who continued to live in an Indian community, Kitkatla. I got to know him first in the late forties. He became the secretary of the union local when it was established in Kitkatla and regularly was a delegate to the annual union conventions. Later he was elected to the General Executive Board of the union and any number of other positions. He just retired recently and sold his boat after he had a couple of heart attacks and had to stop fishing. Ernie was a very capable speaker. He could make it stark and clear what the lack of health services meant to the six hundred people of his village and yet at the same time introduce enough humor into his speech to keep everybody's attention. He always managed to get the union involved and fighting on their side.

In Masset, there were several outstanding people. Two who stand out in my mind are Phyllis Bedard and Claude Davidson, who were active in organizing the cannery there back in the days when the Simpson family owned it. Claude hasn't fished commercially for quite a few years and is now mainly involved in the area of Haida art and culture. But he was one of the stalwarts there in helping to get the union going.

In Klemtu, Maryann Mason was a leader in her own community and one of the best shop stewards in the cannery we ever had. I've already mentioned the host of things that had to be dealt with in a cannery town like Klemtu, and she handled them well.

Those are just a handful of the people who come to mind. But there were dozens of other Indian people along the coast who played an important part in establishing the union in their areas.

But over the long haul the Native Brotherhood leadership was successful in keeping the union at arm's length. If not in all the communities then in many of them. Even where we once had strong participation in the union, by constantly portraying the union and everything about it in the worst possible light, the Native Brotherhood isolated or turned our members in the communities.

For instance, one of the most active union organizers amongst the Indians was George Jefferies of Prince Rupert. He joined the staff of the union and worked as an organizer...
during the fifties. George had had a lot of experience in the Native Brotherhood earlier, he was a fighter for Indian causes and at the same time understood the need for a union.

I remember George coming to one Annual Convention during that period with a grin on his face and saying, "Well partner, look around. What do you see?" I looked over the convention floor and it was one of highest percentages of Indian delegates I'd seen. George was rightly proud of his role in achieving that.

However in the four to five years that he worked for the union, from what he told me himself, he suffered continuous personal attacks on himself and sometimes slanders against his family. Representatives of the Native Brotherhood treated him as some sort of traitor to his people because he was doing an outstanding job in helping to build union locals among native fishermen and plant workers.

Unfortunately, after a number of years George began to buckle under those pressures and eventually quit working for the union altogether and went back fishing. Sometime after that he reappeared as an organizer for the Native Brotherhood and began undoing the work he had accomplished for the union.

When the companies began to shut down plants along the coast we estimated that in less than a decade over a thousand Indian jobs were lost through plant closures and by reduction of the cannery fleets. If I remember correctly, the total work force in the shore plants declined from around 7500 people to about 4000 between the early fifties and the late sixties.

The UFAWU fought those shutdowns every way it could within the limits of our strength. But the Native Brotherhood portrayed that development as if the union was responsible for those shutdowns. Instead of presenting it to their members for what it was - a corporate decision on which they needed to join forces with us to oppose. The Brotherhood leaders made out as if we accepted the shutdowns and centralization as a good thing, when in fact we opposed it as strongly as we could because of what it did to our own membership, including Indian members.

They would pretend that the benefits were going to non-Indian workers when the plants were shut down in places like Klemtu and Goose Bay. They always made it appear as if it were a fight of Indian against non-Indian. Sometimes they'd point the finger at the Japanese-Canadian fishermen, sometimes at white fishermen and shoreworkers. Rather than joining forces with us the Native Brotherhood always managed to load as much of the blame on us as they could get their people to swallow. It often came close to them saying, "They're all whites - the union, the companies, the shoreworkers - all in cahoots against the Indian."

There was no essential conflict between the average native and non native workers in the fish plants or on the fish boats. But because of the unsettled question of aboriginal rights it was possible for some native leaders to play upon that and make it appear that they had to have completely separate organizations for natives within the industry. And anyone who denied their claims was denounced as a racist or a chauvinist of some kind.

In collective bargaining, if each ethnic or racial group were to establish separate negotiations with the companies the only ones who would gain would be the companies.
They'd be able to play one group off against the other. Those who were prepared to sell their labour power the cheapest would be the ones who'd get the lion's share of the employment. Eventually there would be no possibility of taking collective action to enforce contracts or, effectively, even to achieve contracts with the companies. Each group would be powerless against the big operators. Bargaining by separate groups doesn't achieve anything for any of the people who work in the plants or on the fishboats. They don't gain anything by it - although they can sometimes be convinced that they might.

Maybe I shouldn't overstress those reversals. Because the case is that the union still has a substantial Native membership, especially on the north coast - among shoreworkers and others. If you go to our annual convention, you'll find that a good proportion of the delegates are Native members of the UFAWU.

I've wrestled with the question in my own mind for quite a long time and I don't think that the Native Brotherhood is the senior representative of Native interests in B.C. They're not senior to the tribal councils that maintained the tradition of having appointed leaders and hereditary chieftains. The Brotherhood used to pretend that they represented and spoke for all the native people in B.C. but they don't - and never did.

As I see it the question of aboriginal claims and the role played by the Native Brotherhood are two distinct things. The Native Brotherhood attempted to play two distinct and sometimes contradictory roles; one was to deal with questions of aboriginal rights and the other was to attempt to become the bargaining agent for native workers, primarily fishermen and others engaged in the fishing industry. There are things which the Native Brotherhood have done which made it appear to me that they were little more than an arm of the Fisheries Association. They worked very closely with the fish companies.

The overall question of aboriginal rights and claims are matters which will have to be settled in a way that Indian people get away from the feelings of 'small nation chauvinism' which prevail today - an antagonism against anyone who disagrees with their claims. I don't hold any brief for those who say that Native people should get everything that they demand and I don't think that the serious native leaders hold that view. That sentiment is coming from a small number of native demagogues.

Native people do have a claim which is different from that of others and they have every right to pursue a solution to their problems in their own way. But in so doing they shouldn't rip apart organizations which would be of benefit to native as well as non native people in the industry. There is after all no guarantee that native groups will be able to achieve separate enclaves under Indian authority as they are now calling for. Or that when they do achieve it that they will be able to operate within the context of Canadian society and economy in some way which will allow them to dispense with organizations like the United Fishermen and Allied Workers, which has defended the interests of native workers, like those of others, both in the past and in the present.
THE STRIKE IN PRINCE RUPERT

Storm Signals

There was quite a bit of background to the 1967 trawl strike. It's always talked about as a trawl strike but in so far as the northern area is concerned it was both a trawl and a long line strike. There were two or three different things happening concurrently; one was that there were some major changes developing within the trawl fleet. Vessels were becoming larger and were being rigged out with new equipment which led some of the owners to take larger shares of the catch. Despite many attempts we'd never been able to establish coast-wise contracts on trawl share agreements.

Beginning in the early sixties, with the appearance of more heavily capitalized draggers, the vessel owners were starting to increase their share of the catch. The standard share, even without a contract, had been set at about forty percent of the earnings going to the boat and gear. That was after the fuel and operating costs came off the top. In most cases the crews paid their grub bill out of their own share. But the owners of draggers were now pressing for a fifty percent share and were talking about fifty five percent and even more.

We heard of some trawlers operating out of Prince Rupert which took people aboard and didn't put them on share at all. They'd find people looking for work, take them on for a trip or two and pay them off with a few dollars and a suggestion that they might get on as a full crew member later. They were testing the water for what they could get away with.

Experienced fishermen who worked on trawlers were saying that this simply couldn't be allowed to continue otherwise most of them would end up working for peanuts. They'd end up with the kind of trawl sharing that was becoming prevalent on the East Coast of Canada, where something like sixty five percent of the gross value of the landings was taken by the boat owners and thirty five percent was shared among the crew. So that was behind our determination to get a signed share contract from the trawl vessel owners.

Negotiations began in the winter of 1966/67 and notices were sent to all the vessel owners and their bargaining agents, the B.C. Vessel Owners Association and the Prince Rupert Vessel Owners Association. We made trips all around the coast to contact the crews on all the draggers. The great majority could see the need for a signed share agreement.

At the same time a problem came up with some of the halibut long liners fishing out of Prince Rupert. A couple of years earlier a boat called The Blue Ocean had gone down in a storm. All the crew had been members of our union but the vessel owner took the position that he'd signed a contract with the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union some years before and that the crew therefore weren't entitled to benefits under the UFAWU compensation plan.
The crew members of the *Blue Ocean* did receive some compensation for losses from our salmon and herring benefit funds, of which they were participants as members of the UFAWU in other fisheries. But they raised the question, 'What would have happened if we hadn't had that coverage and had lost their lives rather than just their belongings? The only answer I could give them, with the situation we had in their trawl operation, was that they would not have been covered and that there would have been no benefits for their survivors. So we wanted to get a contract covering at least those halibut boats on which the crew were members of the UFAWU.

Up until then we had had a good relationship with the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union. It claimed jurisdiction over halibut fishermen but was concerned exclusively with the long liners which fished for the Prince Rupert Co-op. At that time it was an organization of only some hundred twenty odd fishermen.

They had virtually given us carte blanche to deal with all contracts other than those in halibut long lining. But in fact, on many long line boats the entire crew were members of our union. Since some of these vessels were used interchangeably in dragging we wanted to get their crews covered by our contract and welfare plans. The vessel owners said 'no' to that. The Deep Sea Fishermen's Union said they wouldn't tolerate it.

So the question was of how to go about getting a contract. After meetings with the vessel owners and with the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union it boiled down to a strike vote. In the case of the long liners it only effected vessels operating out the port of Prince Rupert, and didn't effect them all. Because some of them were vessels whose crews we recognized as having signed up with the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union. But since they had never signed up a trawler we considered all trawlers which didn't sign the contract as bound by the strike.

One of the things which has always been difficult about organizing trawlers is that there isn't any specific period or season when you can get them all together. They're coming and going at all times. But we got all the crews in port, held a strike vote and got a big majority to tie up those vessels which hadn't signed a contract. The strike started in the last week of March of 1967.

There were five boats fishing out of Prince Rupert which came in some days after the strike deadline. Since the deadline had been posted before they sailed it seemed to be a calculated decision that they were going to defy the strike. The crews walked off and joined the picket line but the vessel owners immediately got an ex parte injunction which required that their catch be processed regardless of the strike then in progress.

We didn't even know that the injunction was being sought, so we had no opportunity to appear in court and put our statement of facts in front of the judge. He simply issued the injunction on what information he got from the vessel owners. 'Ex parte' means that only one side is heard in the court on the matter of the injunction, in which a judge orders one party to do or to refrain from doing something. At the time the ex parte injunction was being used against the labour movement all over British Columbia. Some years later a legislative change required that employers going for an injunction had to give notice to the
other party, so that they could at least argue the point before the judge came down with a
decision to grant an injunction or not.

In their application for the injunction the vessel owners held that these particular
trawlers were working under a signed agreement with the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union
and therefore were not involved in this strike. We knew that had to be a 'back door'
contract because the crews on the boats had never had an opportunity to even become
members of the Deep Sea Fishermen. If the crewmen on those five boats had been
members of the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union at the time the officers of that organization
could have claimed that their members had agreed to live up to the by-laws of that union,
including having contract agreements signed in their names without resort to a
membership vote. That could have been an argument. But the Deep Sea Fishermen's
officers didn't claim and couldn't claim that. The very fact that most of the crewmen were
out on our picket line demonstrated that they weren't members of the Deep Sea
Fishermen's Union and certainly had had no say in this backdoor agreement.

Vessel owners could do that then, they could sign an agreement with the officers of a
union without the employees being consulted. The vessel owners wouldn't have been able
to get away with it under normal labor law, because even then there were provisions which
required that those covered by the contract had to approve or reject it. But the Labour
Code didn't apply to fishermen.

The vessel owners' lawyers also referred to a 'master agreement' which they had signed
with the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union. When we finally got a copy of this master's
agreement it gave them jurisdiction over every type of fishing that these boats might ever
get into. If they got away with that we suspected that the vessel owners would try to push
us off all the larger boats operating out of Prince Rupert.

The basic problem was that the Prince Rupert Co-op had been expanding it's
operations into trawling. The majority of the Prince Rupert Co-op's Board of Directors
was made up of the owners of boats and the larger boat owners seemed to have become
the predominant voice in the Co-op. The feeling among the large vessel owners was that
they wanted to encompass all their operations and their crews under the jurisdiction of the
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union – even though they had signed contracts with us for the
seine crews.

The judge who issued the original ex parte injunction was one Kirk Smith. He was a
provincial circuit court judge in Nanaimo. His injunction, in essence, was to effectively
call off the strike in so far as this group of vessel owners were concerned. The five boats
were still lying at dockside with the fish aboard in ice. The injunction ordered that these
boats be unloaded and their catch processed "forthwith". But it was worded in an
unusual way.

Injunctions are usually directed toward a specific officer or to the officers of a union to
do something. But this one was directed to the union as a whole. The passage under
debate read 'the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union shall order it's officers and
servants". We held that by a reading of our constitution the union was constituted of its
members as a whole and that they had to be the ones to give that order.
So the battle was on. Our General Executive Board decided to call a referendum of the membership on whether they wanted us to order these struck boats unloaded. Only fourteen or fifteen of the twenty-one members of the General Executive Board were actually at that meeting. The rest were scattered around the fishing grounds and couldn't get in. As secretary-treasurer my name went out on the telegram asking the membership to vote on how the union should respond to the court order. We didn't make any recommendation as to how the membership should vote but something like eighty-six per cent of them voted to reject the court order.

While this vote was taking place I went back to Prince Rupert and held a series of meetings expressly to find some solution to the boats lying there with fish aboard. In past situations like that we'd always attempted to get fish off-loaded. We proposed that the fish be unloaded and the decision of how it was going to be shared decided at a later date. But the feeling of their crews was that some proportion of the earnings of the catch had to be held in escrow. They felt that we couldn't say, 'Alright, just go ahead and sell this fish', because the vessel owners could make off with whatever share they wanted.

The anger was not merely that the vessel owners had disregarded the strike deadline. Even more, it was their actions in signing a phoney agreement with the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union that wiped our union, the crews' union, off the boats. The statements that the vessel owners had made in their injunction application was that Deep Sea represented these crews when in fact they weren't even members and had no knowledge of the agreement that had been signed behind their backs. That was what made the trawlermen so hot.

The vessel owners flatly rejected any proposal other than that they would get the whole proceeds of the trip and make whatever share payments they decided. Otherwise they weren't going to allow their boats to be unloaded. It was almost as if they were willing to let the fish spoil and write it off so they'd have a scandal to present. Eventually the fish did go bad and had to be dumped. And throughout the balance of the strike there was a constant repetition that several hundred thousand pounds of ground fish had gone bad because of the strike.

The strike continued and for a period of two and a half months there was no further court actions. There appeared to be fairly strong unity among the fishermen and the shore plant workers and a determination that there would be no settlement until the vessel owners signed a contract with us.

One of the key factors was that we held the jurisdiction to the shoreworkers in the Prince Rupert Co-op plant. That's what held it in from the end of March till the middle of May. The shoreworkers in the plant had refused to handle fish from the boats that we had declared to be 'hot'. That included the five draggers and also applied to those long liners which hadn't signed a contract yet.

About in the third week of May I was on my way back to Prince Rupert from a General Executive Board meeting in Vancouver and everything still seemed to be quite solid in the strike. I was coming in from the airport when the skipper of the ferry told me that some of the Co-op boats were just then preparing to go out fishing.
When I got down to the Co-op plant a big crowd was standing around watching one long liner getting ice and bait and making ready to go out. The dock was loaded with boat owners and their associates and even some crewmen who were members of our union. One of them had been on our local executive up to that point. Over the next few days those boats did get away to fish.

There was a short period when there was no fish coming in because it takes a while for the trips to be made. But before long the boats which had broken away from the strike returned to unload their catch. When the break came, on the twenty-fourth of May, we faced the necessity of having to either stop production flowing into or flowing out of the Co-op plant. Up to that point the plant had not been on strike, in the usual sense of the term, because the fish they were handling had been caught before the strike started. But now we had to picket it as well.

At first we thought that it would be possible for our members in the Co-op plant to regroup but the management was able to side-line our strongest supporters. There were various ways in which that was done. The senior workers were still allowed to come in to work at first while others handled the 'hot' boats. Our members would be given jobs sweeping up guts or working underneath the plant in all the muck till they came around. What the Co-op management eventually did was to replace all those people who refused to participate in loading and off-loading strike bound boats, or whatever other work was asked of them. Of course they did that in a round-about way but that's what it amounted to.

The Labor Code doesn't actually guarantee the right of union officers access to the members they represent in the work place. Not basically. You have to negotiate that right with the company. If they want to they can stop you from going on their private property. We've never had that as a problem in the industry, not in my time. Except this time in Prince Rupert.

The R.C.M.P. were enlisted and the docks were closed off to officers of our union and others on the strike committee. We couldn't get down to the docks and when the boats came in the Mounties were there to make sure we didn't get aboard them to talk to the crews. There were times when I managed to sneak on to the Co-op docks but then I had to find a way to get back out without being arrested.

We tried to picket the operation from the water with skiffs only to have the R.C.M.P. boat running interference for the fish boats coming in and out. The long and short of it was that we weren't able at any time to stop the Co-op from operating.

You almost felt that you'd been catapulted back into the labour battles of the 1930s. It was about as stiff a battle as had ever hit the fishing industry in British Columbia; except for the fact that they didn't bring out the militia, as they did in some of the strikes earlier in the century. But the companies had plenty of Mounties to make up for that.

When the first break came at the Co-op I couldn't understand it. In talking to our members there, some of whom I'd know for years, I couldn't understand why they had given way and helped load these strike breaking boats. Many them seemed to be among our strongest supporters.
There was all sorts of pressures brought to bear which we learned of later. For instance, some of our members had immigrated from Portugal and Italy during the previous decade. They'd been taken aside and told that if they continued to participate in this 'illegal strike', as it was put to them, if they 'broke the law', as it was phrased, they could be deported. We only learned about that later and we could never get signed depositions from anybody stating they'd been threatened that way.

To what extent that was true or just an excuse I don't know. But those were the sorts of fears and threats which seemed believable in Prince Rupert at the time. There weren't any stops which weren't being pulled against our members and their families. By this time it was more than just the Co-op vessel owners who were involved in this union busting movement. It was considerably broader than that.

The Halibut Capitol Strikes Back

Prince Rupert considers itself to be the Halibut Capitol of the World, which it is. A good part of the income of Prince Rupert depends upon fishing. Fishermen are active in almost every aspect of the life of Prince Rupert. It is a small enough place so that what the owners of a handful of large fishing vessels have to say has some significance in the politics of the town. The conflict between them and the union, and the involvement of Coop fish plant, can become of central importance in the political balance of Prince Rupert.

The charges made against us and the pressures applied on our members were incredible. Even though I and others had run across it often enough before the use of the local press and the radio to distort everything was - incredible. I've rarely seen anything like it even during the worst of the cold war era.

There were newspaper headlines against us almost every day. For instance, one time we were accused of setting five or six trawlers adrift. There was absolutely nothing to that at all, it wasn't even possible. The Prince Rupert Daily News either wouldn't accept or completely distorted every press statement we made. They'd never print a retraction even after it became evident that what they'd said was almost totally false. The local radio stations were the same way.

Just as an example, on one occasion I was on the picket line near the Co-op plant and a reporter from the Prince Rupert Daily News came along and asked me, "You just came back from Vancouver on the plane, did you Homer? Was it crowded?"

"Yeah, the plane was full " I said.

He asked a few other innocuous questions and went away. The next day's issue of the Daily News trumpeted that a plane full of pickets had arrived from the south to bolster the union's sagging picket line. It was a lie cut from whole cloth. The line they were pushing was that the strike didn't have a home base in Prince Rupert and was being fostered by union agitators from the south.

One local radio stations got Phyllis Bedard under the influence of alcohol and put her on the air saying, "Chenny Go Home, Chenny Go Home." "Chenny" meaning "grandfather' in Haida. She was referring to me, as I had been given her grandfather's
name. Some years later Phyllis apologized to me profusely for having done that. But it
did have its impact at the time.

The implication was that the union was a foreign graft on to the life of Prince Rupert.
The demand was that we should all get out of Prince Rupert. It was that sort of a
campaign all the way through. And it did have its effect on people who had been active in
the union. They were subjected to this constant harassment and felt that they were
becoming isolated in the community. So we had some defections after the first two and
three months of the strike.

At about that time there emerged a group which called itself the "Marching Mothers". The idea was taken from a similar stunt which had been pulled during a strike in the
United States some years earlier. It was inspired and given leadership by a local doctor by
the name of Green. He had two sons employed in the Prince Rupert Co-op operations.
Iona Campangola was one of the people directing the traffic of this outfit, explaining to
these Marching Mothers where to go and what to do. She and this doctor Green. This was  before she was an MP - she may have been in the local Liberal organization and I
think her husband had a small business in Prince Rupert. It was  after that  she emerged
on the national political scene and was first elected in the Trudeau sweep in 1968 or so.

The Marching Mothers included the wives of some of the vessel owners but most
weren't involved in the fishing industry at all. They were just women the organizers were
able to mobilize in this anti-union campaign. It was a core of about thirty or forty people
who would move from one picket line to another to harass the pickets and call them
names. These women would march up and down and try to antagonize the pickets in any
way possible. They would go so far as to spit in the faces of the pickets.

That didn't happen to me personally but it did happen to Scotty Neish. Scotty fishes out
of Victoria but he had come up and thrown himself into the strike. He felt there was a
systematic effort to cast people like himself as foreigners in their own country, a man who
had been born here and who had fished the coast for forty years. He told me it was one of
the worst times he'd ever had on a picket line. Just to stand there and have some women
walk up and call him all sorts of names. The abuse he took on the picket lines and while
distributing our bulletin had to be something, because Scotty was not the kind of guy to
complain. He's one of the veterans in the union and had been through some pretty
horrendous strikes in the industry.

The Marching Mothers would parade around with a Canadian flag, trying to convey the
impression that they were patriotic while the union was some kind of foreign conspiracy
out to destroy the economy of Prince Rupert. Their line was that everything could be
settled if only the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union would get out of Prince
Rupert. And they dished out all the anti-communist hysteria and slander that they could
dredge up or had presented to them. Sometimes they organized car cavalcades that went around the town with signs and
banners and loudhailers calling for us to be decertified. They got a lot of press coverage
through that. They acted as if they represented virtually all the women of Prince Rupert,
that the mothers of Prince Rupert and even many of the fishermen's wives were against
the union. In fact we had more women on the picket line and women in the union who supporting the strike than the Marching Mothers ever mobilized.

An incident that comes to mind was when we were picketing on the side of the road near the Co-op plant. Down the street comes a whole flock of these Marching Mothers. Except for the glaring look of hatred on their faces they looked like any other group of women. They halted right in front of our picket line in an obviously prearranged way. There was a minister of the faith with them, though I'm not sure which faith it was. He began to bless the people passing through the picket line to work in the plant. He also blessed the boats and the crews and the skippers who were going out - blessing the scabs in other words. He even blessed the wives and families that would be waiting for them while they were out at sea. All this was accompanied with long and loud prayer. When he got into high gear he shifted into the Lord's Prayer, which all the Marching Mothers and a few men who were with them took up. When they got to the line "And deliver us from evil" they all turned on cue and looked directly at us. Oh, the venom there was in it! The look of hatred on their faces was something.

Roy Mouland, who was on the picket line, started heading for Vince Dickson, an officer of the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union who was there helping lead the scabs through the picket line. Dickson hadn't even been a member of the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union prior to the strike; he'd been brought into the dispute by the C.L.C.. Roy started calling Dickson "You dirty rotten scab herder." I managed to steer Roy away from the fight I could see coming. Because if he laid a finger on Dickson it would have meant Roy going to jail.

At one point a ministerial committee from the churches in Prince Rupert met with us. Our 'refusal to obey the law', as they put it, was creating an attitude where younger people, especially fishermen's sons, considered it acceptable to disobey the law if they thought they were in the right. That was their main concern, they said.

During the strike we put out a bulletin explaining what was happening and trying to counter the stories being put out by the local press. One of the ministers was at pains to nail down who had written certain passages in the bulletin."How do these bulletins get written?" and "Who wrote the passage about the judge's injunction not having effect?" I told him that many people contributed material for the bulletin but that I had written that particular passage.

Later in the course of our trial for contempt of court, that minister from Prince Rupert was brought in as a witness for the prosecution, to identify me as the person who had written that passage in our strike bulletin that said 'injunctions don't catch fish'. It's the only occasion that I know of where a minister was brought in as a witness against a trade union, and that over information arising from a private discussion.

**More Law and Orders**

One day at the end of May or in early June, while we were picketing near the Co-op, an R.C.M.P. sergeant approached us and informed me that a particular section of the
criminal code could be applied to us. I asked him whether anything we were doing on the
picket lines violated the law and what this section he'd cited meant.

"It's not for me to say," he said. "You'd better check with your lawyer".

I phoned our lawyer in Vancouver and he looked up the section. It turned out to be
something used to enforce payments made under court order. He gave the example of
individuals who have been ordered to pay alimony and who have skipped out on it. It's
possible under that section to pick a person up, bring him back to where the court order
had been issued and hold him in jail until he makes arrangements to pay. To Rankin's
knowledge it had never been used in Canada in relation to trade unions or strikes.

So I got on the phone and managed to get through to Robert Bonner, then the Social
Credit Attorney-General. He was in Williams Lake attending the Stampede. I asked him
how this law might apply to us but he refused to give me any information.

"I'm not going to answer any questions pertaining to the law. That's for you and your
lawyer to determine. All I'm going to say is you've been warned. Forewarned is
forearmed." That's what the Attorney-General said.

I protested that that didn't tell me what was expected of us or what we might be
considered to be in violation of. But that's all I got out of him.

A few days later a few us were on our way to a general membership meeting in Prince
Rupert when we were accosted by two R.C.M.P. officers. One of them tapped me on the
shoulder and said I was under arrest. Along with me was a fisherman by the name of Jose
Verde. When we got into the cells, which are under the court house in Rupert, I found
that they'd also arrested George Hewison as he was about to attend that same meeting.
George comes from an old fishing family and was our northern coast organizer although
he was barely twenty-one then. The Mounties had also arrested Jack Nicol, the union's
business agent, in his hotel room.

The Mountie who arrested me cited this peculiar section of the criminal code before
they hauled us away but they still gave us no indication of what we were supposed to
have violated. So in effect we were arrested without ever knowing what the charges were.
We were released on our own recognizance at around midnight. But the threat was clear
that they could pick us up anytime they wanted.

It would have been more usual if the police had come down to the picket line and made
up some charge about 'blocking access to private property' or 'creating public mischief' or
used any one of the other laws they always have handy during strike. The police can
push into the picket line and haul out anybody they want to arrest by claiming he didn't
obey a legal order and you don't have any come back.

Joe Verde, who was a trawlerman and an active rank and file member of the union, was
very upset. He told me about having lived under the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal and
having come to Canada thinking that this was a democracy. And here he was arrested for
something that no one could explain to him. All he'd been doing was exercising his right
to picket. That wasn't even the charge. There was no real charge.
It was such a blatantly unjust use of a law. Because the charges under this section of the criminal code were later dropped entirely. We never did discover how they were going to proceed or what they were going to claim we had violated.

Joe was out again picketing near the Co-op with his wife and one of his children when I went down the next morning. I figured that the police would come down hard on him if he were arrested a second time. Our lawyer had told us that anybody we thought was being targeted should be kept off the picket line for a while.

"Joe. I think we should check the other picket lines and see if they need a hand." I was going to take him to a less visible location where he'd be less likely to be spotted. Had I asked him to come off the picket line I knew damn well that he wouldn't do it. He handed his sign to somebody else and his wife stayed behind. By the time we got to the far end of town, where we had another picket line, the local radio station announced that the R.C.M.P. had arrested Jack Nicol for the second time.

Jack spent more than a week in jail on the charge that he had violated something or other just by being on the picket line. That never came up for trial either. He came straight out of jail in Prince Rupert on those trumped up charges to face the contempt of court action in Vancouver.

The strike carried on and around the twentieth of June we got a notice to appear in Vancouver before one Judge Thomas Dohm on a contempt of court citation. I'm not sure how the judicial system operates because in some cases contempt citations are decided by the very judge who laid the charge in the first place. But in other cases, in order to demonstrate some semblance of fairness, it goes to another judge for decision. Kirk Smith, the judge who'd issued the original injunction and had moved to have us cited for contempt of court, didn't preside over this trial.

After hearing the evidence Dohm sentenced the three officers of the union, the president, the secretary-treasurer and the business agent, to a year in jail and levied a twenty five thousand dollar fine against the union itself for not having immediately obeyed the injunction. We were seized right in the court room and spent the next ten days in Okalla. Our lawyers figured that they'd have us out on bail until our appeal hearing was held but it took them ten days to get us out. The strike continued.

When we were first put into Okalla, there was an upsurge of support from our membership. For a while it actually stiffened the picket line in Prince Rupert. We were in jail from the twentieth of June to the end of the month. The appeal hearing didn't take place until some time in September. In the interval a number of things happened.

There had been some favourable developments right at the outset of the strike. The group of trawlers fishing out of Campbell Avenue had signed contracts with us right at the beginning. So we had a portion of the trawl fleet fishing under a signed contract. The company-owned draggers held out until early July and then they settled.

But a group within the B.C. Fishing Vessel Owners Association served us with another court action while we were still being held in Okalla. I remember being taken out of jail in handcuffs and brought into a court room to respond to their application for another injunction. These vessels operated as draggers in the winter and as salmon seiners in the
summer and fall. These vessel owners held we had no right to prevent them from entering the salmon fishery simply because they had been strike-bound as trawlers. The union took the position that we would clear none of these boats until the owners signed a trawl agreement.

There was a different judge presiding over that hearing. He hadn't been prominent in labour cases and used very direct language. In referring to this group from the B.C. Fishing Vessel Owners Association the judge used the phrase, "You didn't come into court with clean hands." He found, in effect, that it was a legal labour dispute and that the union had the right to keep these boats tied up until their owners had signed a contract. As a result they finally signed the trawl agreement in July.

**The Balance Sheet**

Despite our being in jail the battle still went on in Prince Rupert. From the beginning we were up against the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union, which was allowing itself to be used by vessel owners to push us off their boats. The conflict was portrayed in the Prince Rupert press as this 'giant union', that was us, trying to smash this small home town local.

We had held meetings in Vancouver and Prince Rupert with unions affiliated with the B.C. Federation of Labour and explained our position. We went into the history of the Deep Sea Fishermen's union, which hadn't opened any new contracts and hadn't been involved in trade union activity for a period of thirty odd years. It was an organization most union people hadn't even heard of.

As far as the Canadian Labour Congress was concerned, it's officers and staff pursued a vendetta against us throughout the entire strike. They used every means to discourage their affiliates from giving us support in any way. For instance, at one point it might have been possible for us to get the support of the railway unions affiliated to the C.L.C. to declare Co-op cargo 'hot'. But pressure was applied on the rail unions not to give us any support. The same pressure limited financial support from other unions, which we desperately needed, not only for strike relief but also for the heavy legal costs we had in defending ourselves from the courts.

At one point we discussed joining together with the independent Canadian unions which were then beginning to form. The Pulp and Paper Workers Union in Prince Rupert had broken away from its International and had gotten certification in various pulp mills along the coast. We had fairly close relations with the P.P.W.C., although some of their officers held that we were being contrary to our own principles because we were still trying to get reinstated in the C.L.C. They attempted to persuade us that the best route to go was to form a separate all-Canadian federation of labour. We chewed that over on various occasions but decided that it would be a mistake. It wasn't going to help in the long haul to simply have one more labour federation. So we decided against it.

The start of the salmon gillnet season on the Skeena was coming up in July and there was some discussion as to whether we would be able to pull off a strike in that fishery to win the battle we were engaged in. But that was never a real possibility. It was clear to us
that salmon fishermen were not prepared to stop fishing in order to win a share agreement for the trawler and long liner crews.

In mid July, looking at the situation, we decided that it was a hopeless proposition to try to move back into the Prince Rupert Co-op operations. Some of their vessel crews, who had been our members, had gone over to the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union by this time and a break away organization had been set up among the Co-op shoreworkers. A lot of new people had been recruited in the Co-op plant during the interval of the strike and the management did a pretty thorough job of vetting each and every one of them. Some of our members went back into the plant to attempt to bring the others back into our union. But it wasn't possible.

In the end, the Co-op had the UFAWU decertified in their plant. The Royal cannery also tried to set up a break away shoreworkers association. We managed to beat back that move, although for a while it was touch and go. We held on to the contracts in all the company canneries up there.

At the end of July we went to the membership with the recommendation that we terminate the strike. A vote was taken near the beginning of August. By that time almost all the draggers and long liners along the coast, other than those fishing for the Co-op, were signed under contracts. The very last of the contracts were signed by B.C. Packers and Canadian Fish. The only reason that they signed a trawl agreement was that they wanted to use the boats in salmon seining.

Calling off the strike was a tough decision. Because even at that point there were members of our union who didn't want to go back under the conditions which would exist, with us having lost the contract in the Co-op. But as far as I could see, and they themselves could see, it was a hopeless situation. We could have carried on picketing indefinitely and not gained anything. We had been decertified at the Co-op plant. We'd lost the contracts covering crewmen in Co-op salmon and herring seining, as well as on their trawlers and long liners. So we lost virtually everything that we had ever held in the Prince Rupert Co-op operations.

The Co-op management allowed our members who had refused to handle the struck boats to come back but without regaining their seniority. It meant that they would be the last hired and first let go in any season and would come after those who had been hired a few months earlier during the strike. Some of them did go back but others felt they wouldn't accept those conditions and how they would be treated at work and sought jobs elsewhere.

In the main, our members who had been employed on the Co-op vessels never got back on those boats. There were people like Roy Mouland who had fished with the Co-op during his fifteen working years. He was one of our staunchest supporters and went into it with his eyes wide open. When the strike ended he was not prepared to join the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union to get a job and felt he'd be blacklisted in any case. He eventually left the industry entirely, moved up into the interior and never came back.

There were others like Manuel Siquera. He was frozen out of the Co-op fleet and eventually left Rupert altogether. He didn't even want to be around the place anymore.
Later he got on a halibut boat sailing out of Vancouver and did quite well. But there were others who lost their berths on boats and their jobs and continued to suffer economically long afterward.

In the aftermath of the strike there was the expectable bitterness and recriminations, directed at the Co-op and the vessel owners, at those who were considered strikebreakers and to some extent at the union leadership. It took a number of forms.

Some of our members said, "We fell into a trap there. What we should have said was, 'Take the bloody fish.'" That's easy to say in retrospect. But it's hard to know what should have been done at the time. Because the feeling of the membership in Prince Rupert was strongly against just letting the vessel owners have their way.

Many of our union members took the position that we should condemn Co-ops or at least treat them like any other profit oriented organization. That's probably the main sentiment which crystallized in the union after that strike: the view that there can never be a fundamental alliance between trade unions and Co-ops any more than between capital and labour. Yet Co-ops were originally formed by people who supported unions. The Co-ops once held that there should always be trade union organization in the plant and on the packers. They themselves held that the Co-op should work in conjunction with existing fishermen's unions. But the large vessel owners who came to dominate the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op would in no way tolerate any union organization which would restrict their right to fish. They wanted to arrogate to themselves the right to fish, without restraint, regardless of whether there was a strike on or what was happening to workers in the industry.

Some of our members said that we should have foreseen the whole thing and shouldn't have gotten into it. But that's never possible, however experienced you are. Others thought that we shouldn't have pursued the strike as long as we did, that we should have gone back to the membership and said "We can't win this thing" and settled earlier.

I've thought about that many times but I don't know how it could have been avoided. If we had backed off and not gotten those trawl contracts signed there would have been a mushrooming of non-union operations in the trawl and halibut fleets all along the coast. So, in retrospect I think we had to keep the strike going until we got those contracts signed.
Contempt of Court

It seemed to me that a judge could order or require almost anything in an injunction and that he could cite almost anything as being in contempt of his ruling. One infamous example was when the editor of the *Fisherman* went to jail for a comment he made in our paper. George North wrote an editorial about an injunction which had been leveled against another union in 1959. He wrote "Injunctions can't catch fish or build bridges." The judge sent him to jail for a month for having written that and slapped a heavy fine on our union for allowing that to appear in the *Fisherman*.

It was Judge Manson who had issued an injunction against the Ironworkers Union shortly after the Second Narrows Bridge disaster. The bridge collapsed into the inlet during construction and nineteen construction workers were killed. The Ironworkers Union, which happened to be in contract negotiations prior to that, decided that they wouldn't go back to work until some changes were made. In a court order, Manson ordered them to either appear at the bridge site and go to work at eight the next morning or to come before him at ten o'clock to show cause as to why they shouldn't be cited for contempt of court. That injunction applied to the individual ironworkers as well as to the union local and its executive.

It was quite an order. I went to the court hearing and remember the incident well. The ironworkers came up before Manson the next morning, one by one, each with some reason why he couldn't be at the bridge site. One guy said he had a cold, another that his wife was ill, somebody else said that he didn't know why he didn't go to work, he just didn't.

Manson later sentenced three of the officers of the Ironworkers union to a year in jail and levied fines in the order of ten or twenty thousand dollar against the union local because it didn't order its members back to work. There were quite a few people who were prepared to face time in prison rather than obey that injunction.

Tom McGrath was one of the three union officers sentenced for contempt by Manson. Tom had previously been a seaman and had been active in the Canadian Seamen's Union. Later he was the leader of the C.B.R.T.'s seaman's local here on the West Coast. But at the time he was in the local executive of the Ironworkers Union. Shortly afterwards, the International moved in and deposed the whole of the local executive. So they were getting it from both sides. The irony of it was that by that time they had basically won the battle with the courts. The B.C. Appeal Court overturned Manson's ruling eventually. But it showed how far a judge could go in laying down just about anything in an injunction and holding almost anything as contempt of court.

In our case, the three UFAWU officers, Steve Stavenes, Jack Nicol and myself, had already been convicted of contempt of court by Judge Dohm and we were out on bail pending appeal. We didn't know what the decision of the appeal court was going to be or
whether Judge Dohm’s sentence would be upheld. But a number of union officials had recently gone to jail on contempt charges in BC. The heads of the longshore locals, ten of their leaders, had been in jail for a month or so for disobeying a back-to-work order by the court, Paddy Neale, a prominent Vancouver union official, had been in jail for three or four months because of a court order in the Lenkurt strike.

In finding us guilty, Dohn took note of the fact that other trade union officers had gone to jail for disobeying court orders but that it hadn't done anything to stop defiance of the courts by trade unions and that therefore he was sentencing us to twelve months each. And that if there were any further cases of contempt of court the sentences were going to be much heavier.

The hearing of our appeal took place in Victoria sometime in late October or early November. The appeal court found that, by looking through the union's constitution, it was not valid to say that the three officers were the union, as was stated in the wording of the original ex parte injunction. However that was just brushed aside. It was established in court that Steve Stavenes, the president of the union, had been on the union boat travelling between Bella Coola and Vancouver at the time we were supposed to have disobeyed the injunction. But the appeals judge held that the meeting of the General Executive Board ought to have included the president of the union who ought to have ordered that the injunction be obeyed. The judge ruled that it didn't matter whether Steve Stavenes had participated in the decision of the General Executive or not. Since he was the president of the union he ought to have known and should have done something about it.

So, in a rather convoluted way the appeal judge decided that we were indeed guilty and upheld the sentence against Steve Stavenes and myself. Jack Nicol's case turned on a somewhat different legal point and his conviction was overturned. But Steve and I ended up going to jail. We were taken out to Okalla shortly before Christmas, 1967, and the union later got stuck with damages in the order of a hundred thousand dollars in a civil suit brought by the owners of the Coop boats we had declared hot during the strike. It was a heavy blow to our union's finances.

In Jail

A lot of people have asked me, "What's it like to be in jail?" Well, it's about the same for anybody regardless of how they got there. We weren't given any special treatment and were just another number.

At Okalla we were sent to work in the cow barns at first. Okalla had originally been a prison farm although there wasn't too much of that left. Steve and I shovelled cow manure for a while. There were plenty of guys there and not much work to do.

The worst thing about being in jail is the utter boredom. You try to find something to do to prevent yourself from going stir crazy. After a while we were asked whether we wanted to apply to go to one of the forestry camps. We'd heard from some of the other guys in Okalla about time they'd served in forestry camps in the Chilliwack Valley. That sounded like the best thing for us if we had to be in prison so both Steve and I applied to be sent there.
The very next day we were told that we'd be taken off to a camp over on northern Vancouver Island. That was something we hadn't bargained on. Steve and I decided that we weren't going to agree to that because visits by our families would be a hell of a lot more difficult and expensive. It would be an added strain on them. But the following day we were shipped to the old Willington Road jail near Swartz Bay.

Steve and I had decided that if we were shipped off like that we weren't going to work. We knew that there would be repercussions; we arrived at the Willington jail on a weekend and they put us to the test on Monday.

In jail, everybody lines up in the morning, a count is made of the prisoners and you're assigned whatever work you're going to do that day. We lined up with the rest of the prisoners but as they assigned various groups to different jobs we just stood there. Finally there are just the two of us standing there alone. So they ran us back to our cells and a little later came along and took us to the isolation cells.

We spent the next twenty-four hours in the hole. You're in a concrete cell that's only a few feet square. You've got no clothes on except a thin coverall and a single blanket at night. There's no bed or bunk and you have to wrap yourself up in the blanket and stretch out on the concrete floor when you want to sleep. There's no toilet. The toilet is a cut-off bleach bottle and you've got to be damn careful that you don't spill it. There is almost no light, just a very dim light from the corridor that comes through a small aperture in the cell door. Steve and I were in separate cells; we could shout at each other but we couldn't see each other. He was then in his early sixties and I was forty-five.

You're on bread and water, although, for some reason we did get one regular meal while we were in the hole. I remember taking a bone, after I'd chewed the meat off, and scratching my initials on the cell wall. I was scratching away most of the night.

The next morning we were taken before the head warden. He called us in separately and started right off with a tirade. He wasn't going to tolerate any resistance on our part. Who did we think we were? We were just prisoners to him, and so on and so forth. At the height of his tirade I said, "I understand that you're only doing what you've probably been ordered to do. But somebody from on high has got the knife into us, shipping us to a camp on Vancouver Island. As trade unionists we know that there is only one thing that we can do and that is not do anything."

"I'm sentencing you to nine days loss of remission," he barked.

The normal procedure is that you get one day a week off your sentence for good behaviour, so that if you're sentenced to twelve months you'd normally get a couple of months off on remission. But we'd been told we'd have to serve our full sentence.

"We've been told by our lawyers that we aren't eligible for remission," I said.

The warden was in a froth by this time and said, "I sentence it to you anyway". Eventually it did count, it meant that we stayed in prison nine days longer than we otherwise would have. Because the Attorney-General later backed down and granted us the normal rights to remission.

Shortly after, we were visited by John Stanton, one of the lawyers working on our case. Our lawyers got to the labour movement and raised enough stink that the corrections
department took us from the Willington Road jail and moved us to a prison camp in the Chilliwack River valley, where we spent the remainder of our sentence cutting brush and burning slash at a reforestation site.

Life isn't physically all that bad in those forestry camps. They were not that much different than logging camps, except for the fact that you couldn't leave and had to put up with all this guff from the guards. There were complaints about food and about this and that but I can think of a lot worse situations. If you were inside the Federal Penitentiary system, like the penitentiary that existed at New Westminster, I imagine that could be as bad as what political prisoners have suffered in other countries.

We'd leave camp at about eight in the morning and would work cutting out brush. It was mainly reforestation work on tracts that had been replanted with young trees some time before.

What I knew about jail before going in came mainly from accounts by political or class prisoners who'd done time. For example I'd read Eugene Debs account, who had spent seven months on one occasion and three years of a ten year sentence on another, as a political prisoner in America. And I had read about other people in other parts of the world. So I was somewhat more philosophically prepared to spend what time I had to in jail without feeling the complete isolation which other prisoners do.

I was strengthened by the fact that almost every mail day I'd get letters and telegrams of support. Not just from people who knew me personally in the fishing industry but from people in the trade union movement all across Canada and even in the United States and from as far away as Australia. You can't help but be strengthened by that kind of thing.

The feeling I had, all the way through, was that it was a calculated injustice that I and Steve were in jail in the first place. Steve felt the same. He was a very strong person in that respect all the way down the line.

One of the things that struck both Steve and me was the level of animosity between racial groups in this small camp. The French-Canadian prisoners were all in one bunkhouse, most of the Indians were in another. The one I was in had a mix of prisoners and I continually worked at trying to combat racial antagonism while I was there, as did Steve. We got some allies by repeatedly saying, "Why should we have this racial animosity when we are locked up together here?" We made a little progress but it was an ingrained sentiment by that point. In some instances the guards exacerbated the antagonisms as part of the technique of divide and rule.

I think the thing that got to me most of all was the callous way in which the average prisoner was treated; people who were completely defenceless. There were no end of rules and restrictions which just made no sense, except as mindless rules that had to be obeyed. They are there to underline the fact that you are completely at the mercy of how the guards decide to act. If you make a complaint the only thing that you're sure of is abuse and maybe being brought up on a charge. Under no circumstances will your grievances be listened to.
You come to wonder if it's not a purposeful process, to dish out as much indignity and create as much a feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness as possible. The feeling that you can't change anything. That you can't even raise any question, no matter how logical it might be, without being told "That's the way it is. Accept it or else."

My own anger grew because of those kinds of things. But I still couldn't do anything about it. I kept trying and subsequently lost some of my good time as a result.

I had the feeling that the average prisoner suffered a lot more from being deprived of family contact than I did. In many cases they had completely lost contact with their wives and families because they were imprisoned a long ways away from their homes. Visits were restricted to one a month, all on a given day during specified hours. So if someone's wife missed a bus or couldn't make it on that day the prisoner wouldn't have a visit in less than two months.

On one occasion I wound up with a fifteen day loss of remission over an inmate with a wife and child who had been moved to one of the camps further up the valley. Fred had gotten word that his wife had been rushed to hospital. He was brought down to our camp, which was the only one with an outside telephone line, and asked for permission to make a phone call to find out about his wife. But the guard in charge that evening said he would have to get the warden's permission to make a call so the answer was 'no'.

I was sitting in our cabin after work when Fred came in and started telling us about this and saying that he was going to run. That was fairly easy to do in those camps. There are no walls and only two guards covering fifty prisoners. But the place is quite isolated, with only one road out. So most prisoners trying to escape never make it. They're usually picked up at the road junction near Vedder Crossing or they're arrested at their homes, because that's where they're usually running to.

"All that will happen is they'll bring you back and you get another three months on top of it for trying to escape," we told Fred and finally got him to give up the idea.

During the evening mug up I noticed that the guard in charge of the camp for the evening, a guy by the name of Gardiner, had a visiting Roman Catholic priest with him. I went over and said that if the problem with Fred making the phone call was the money, I had a few dollars in my account and would be willing to cover the cost. The guard told me to mind my own business and keep my nose clean.

I was about to answer him back when the priest who was sitting beside him spoke up. "Now Homer," he called me by my first name, "Don't get yourself into trouble over this. If he can't get the call through I'll do it at my own expense." I didn't remember him but he apparently knew me from Ocean Falls. "Thank you father. But I don't know what you're going to be able to do for this man," I said and nodded toward the guard.

A few days later I was called into the subwarden's office and told that I had to face charges. The charge was that I had abused the officer and that I was planning to seize the telephone and make an unauthorized call. A totally ridiculous and trumped up charge.

The subwarden asked how I pleaded and I said "Not guilty". He said that he didn't feel qualified to deal with the matter and that he was going to have somebody else handle it. About a week later I was hauled up in front of a warden from one of the other prison
camps who was acting as the judge. The guard who had laid the charge in the first place, isn't there. Instead, there's another guard who wasn't even present during the incident. The charge is read and this warden asks, "How did he plead?"

The guard says "He pled guilty."

"I did not. I pled not guilty." Back and forth it goes. No record of the hearing or anything.

"Well did he or didn't he plead guilty?" the warden asks.

"Yes, he did plead guilty" says the guard.

"That's good enough for me" says the warden. "Fifteen days loss of remission." It was an example of the kangaroo court system we have in prisons.

The only appeal you could make was through the Chief Corrections officer in Victoria whose name was Rhodes-Smith. I had written him a long letter pertaining to another inmate, a young fellow who was doing really hard time. He worked his butt off when he was on the job and one day while we were out working together he hit a sapling which bounced back and a needle got stuck in his eyeball. By the next day there was a big, inflamed spot on his eyeball and it seemed to be getting worse. Eventually he persuaded the guards to take him to a doctor in Chilliwack. By this time about three days had passed.

The doctor examining him said he couldn't determine whether it was a flare up of an old injury to the eyeball or the result of this accident but told him not to go out in the cold until the eye had healed. However, the guards decided that this prisoner was just malingering and insisted on sending him out to work in the bush the next day. Since he refused to do that they shipped him back to Okalla. Which meant that he'd probably spend additional time in isolation as well.

I wrote Rhodes-Smith in Victoria about that and about a few similar incidents, all in one long letter. Some time later he came to the camp and I thought he would look into some of these matters. But instead I was told by the warden that I was going before Rhodes-Smith and that there were some additional charges against me. They can trump up any charge they want to.

So I came up before Rhodes-Smith. He's sitting there with his aides and I'm standing at attention like a soldier at a court martial. He started off in his broad English accent, "Did you write this lettah?"

"Yes, I think it's my letter," I said.

Then he started into a lecture about how no prisoner is permitted to involve himself in the affairs of any other prisoner. 'Who do I think I am?' 'Do I think I'll be allowed to run a union in jail?' All this over reasonable and simple grievances.

I had to stand there and listen to his tirade. At the end I said something like, "Perhaps you'd better understand why prisoners feel the way they do if you'd sometimes talk to people who are behind bars and learn something about their side of the story rather than relying exclusively on the views of the guards. I wrote that letter in good faith but I can see that it's impossible for you to listen to what prisoners have to say."
With that he really blew up. He said "I've spend eighteen years in the correctional system and I don't intend to allow you to instruct me on how it should be run." He launched into another tirade and wound up saying that if he had his way he'd send me to Prince George to finish out my sentence. He would liked to have sent me as far away from my family as he possibly could, make me do as hard time as possible. So it was obvious that there was no possibility of getting any redress.

The injustice of being there rankled all through out our sentence. But I can't say it was the biggest thing in my mind. When I came out of jail I was asked by the press what being in jail was like. I said there were too many moonlighters and misfits amongst the guards and not enough training of them. I referred to Commissioner Rhodes-Smith as being responsible for the failure of the system. As to how to improve the system, I said that Rhodes-Smith should be fired along with all his top-level appointees. He then wrote asking for permission to use the TV tapes of my remarks. I checked with my lawyer who said this would enable Rhodes-Smith, with my consent, to bypass legal action necessary to use the tapes pursuant with his threat to sue me for what I had said to the press. I proposed that we put my charges to a commission of inquiry, to check the validity of my statements. That was totally unacceptable to him, so he let the matter drop.

I had more time to reflect on my life during the eleven months I spent in jail than probably any other period since. One of the things I thought about was that I might have wound up in jail a lot earlier. For example, in 1946 when I was given the job by the Vancouver Labour Council of rounding up pickets during the Province strike. Other people went to jail for actions on that picket line but I didn't. There were probably occasions when I could have been sent to jail for defending trade union rights but wasn't. So, as one of our union members once said in a cynical way about the courts and justice, "Justice had to be done."
ON THE HUSTINGS AND CAST ADRIFT

One of the more traumatic incidents in my life emerged shortly after I got out of jail. That is, I left the Communist party for some three years. To convey what that meant to me, I should go back to one of the things I'd been doing over the previous fifteen years, which was running as a candidate for the party in both federal and provincial elections.

I was first approached to run as an L.P.P. candidate in 1953. It was just at the end of the Korean War and at the beginning of a mini depression here in B.C. I knew what the results might be but over the years I ran in both Federal and Provincial elections as a candidate for the party and on the whole I feel it was a worthwhile thing to do. I always felt that the Communist party should run candidates to show that it was part of the Canadian political scene. That any party which didn't run candidates would be considered as some kind of secret sect, which the capitalist press always described the Communist party as being.

One of the first people I heard running for the Labour Progressive Party in Delta was old Charlie Steward of the Street Railwaymen's Union. He was asked from the floor what the essential difference was between the C.C.F. and the L.P.P. He answered that the L.P.P. believes that we are living in a class structured society and that the essential driving force is the class struggle, which takes many forms and is sometimes recognized as such and sometimes not. That the L.P.P. bases itself on the working class and believes that change has to come about by both parliamentary action and by other kinds of working class action. He was very forthright about that and I was quite impressed. I tried to be equally clear and straightforward about it when I was a candidate myself.

Over the years I was asked by any number of C.C.F or N.D.P supporters, in the community and in my own family, why I didn't drop my public position as a Communist, since I'd never get elected, and run for the C.C.F. I'd have to explain in the same way that Charlie Steward did. Probably the most difficult thing was to deal with the C.C.F. supporters in our union. They considered that any vote I would get would be taken away from the C.C.F. While that was true to a certain extent it didn't follow automatically. But often I'd simply have to say that they'd have to vote against me if they disagreed with what I said. That I wasn't going to support the C.C.F. against my own judgement just because our union members supported it. I wasn't running as a trade union leader, which I made clear in every campaign. I was running as a candidate of the Communist Party because I didn't believe in the C.C.F. or N.D.P. policies. I didn't believe they were willing to follow their own resolutions made in convention, let alone the steps necessary to make some fundamental change possible in this country should they ever be elected. It would often end up where I had to say, "Obviously we can't see eye to eye."

The first time I ran was in a Federal election in a riding where the Liberal incumbent was Tom Goode Senior. That was an added attraction for me because he had been one of the
supporters of the North Pacific Fishing Treaty, which all fishermen here opposed because it opened up the door to virtually unrestricted high seas fishing by the Japanese. On that and on a host of other issues Goode had taken the side opposed to the union. So I got a chance to deal with him in his own backyard on some of those issues.

In those years there were any number of well attended election forums organized by rate payer groups and community organizations. They brought together the various candidates to present their positions with a question and answer period afterwards. It wasn't like it is today, where the campaigns are packaged and conducted on television and radio, with no chance of confronting the candidates. One of the reasons that there are very few election forums of that kind today is that the old line parties don't want to participate in them and have built their election strategies around television, where everything is prepared for them and they aren't faced with any embarrassing questions.

During the period when "peace" was a dirty word, you had a hell of a time getting other candidates to express themselves on that topic. The only time you'd get a Liberal or Tory candidate talking about 'peace' it was peace through increased armament, peace through further war preparations.

I put the issue of peace and disarmament in the forefront of my speeches time and time again, raising the question of Canada breaking with organizations like NATO and NORAD and becoming a country working for peace rather than just being a tail of the American kite. If you raised that you were considered a traitor to Canada in the minds of a lot of people. On the other hand, you could stimulate a certain amount of rethinking on the part of some individuals when you explained how Canadian sovereignty was being lost by acting as a lackey for the U.S.

It's not simply wishful thinking to believe you can get your position considered in open debate. Not unless you're a complete cynic. Of course you can't beat the capitalist media with the limited funds and appearances we had available. You can't get to the vast majority of people who have been effected by media propaganda over the years. But you can get to some people on a person to person basis. So I don't think that getting involved in the electoral process was a waste of time. In any case, it was one pole of my work with the party.

There always have been on-going policy differences within the Communist party ever since I became a member. But in the late sixties it tended to be an internal struggle between the supporters of Nigel Morgan, the provincial party secretary, and Charlie Curran, the party organizer in B.C. At the time Nigel Morgan was quite ill and some people in the party felt that we had to get someone to replace him as leader, even if only temporarily. I was then a member of the Provincial Central Committee and my name was put forward as someone to fill Nigel Morgan's temporarily.

I spent some time thinking about it and finally came to the conclusion that I was prepared to take on a full time party job if I were elected. That would have meant giving
up my job with the UFAWU, but it wouldn't necessarily have been a detriment to the union. The change wouldn't be made overnight. I think that replacing and renewing union leadership is a good thing and I didn't think I was irreplaceable. One of our union's vice presidents always told me, "Nobody's irreplaceable."

So I decided to let my name go forward. But as soon as I did, all hell broke loose. Previous to that there had been a study made on how leadership of the provincial party should be handled. I was on the committee set up to report on that question but by then I was so tied up in contract negotiations that I didn't even read the draft report that this committee issued. But as soon as I let my name stand for provincial secretary I was considered to be part of a faction opposed to Nigel Morgan and was suspect of trying to oust the provincial party leadership.

In the meantime the strike in Prince Rupert and the court cases all intervened and I wound up going to jail. While I was in jail the invasion of Czechoslovakia took place. I sent a note out - by the private ways there are to get stuff in and out of jail - and criticized developments in Czechoslovakia. I said that I wanted to hear more about it than what appeared in the capitalist press or even in the party press. It sounded to me that the Soviet Union was trying to dictate everything that was going on in Eastern Europe despite promising they weren't going to do that any more. It seemed to me that Dubcek must have something on the ball since he appeared to be supported by the majority of the population. Those were the sorts of things I said in that letter to the party leadership in B.C. That put me at odds with a lot of people in the party.

By the time I came out of jail there were people who had decided to break with the party on the issue of Czechoslovakia alone. And there were others in the party who wanted to expel those who disagreed with the party position, which supported the Soviet actions.

I got my chance to make my position clear shortly after coming out of jail because there was a party convention being held then. I stood up at the convention and said that I was critical of what had been done and I was dissatisfied with the treatment being handed out to a lot of good people who were being accused of being traitors to their own political beliefs simply because they opposed what was happening in Czechoslovakia and disagreed with the response of the party in Canada. I held that we shouldn't pursue the debate to the point that we expel members or they quit because of it. That we were a political party in Canada, with immediate and long term tasks to tackle here. That we should decide our positions on that not on events happening halfway around the world.

During the couple of days that the convention went on reports were coming in of people who had quit the party. The expulsions of members by the party hadn't started yet but when the names of people who had left the party were read out from the podium people at the convention would applaud. Saying in effect, "Good riddance." It was appalling.

Near the end of the convention I stood up again and said that I myself was leaving the party - not because of events in Czechoslovakia but because of the actions here. I said that I couldn't understand how the party could treat people who had been their comrades, good
people, that way. I made it clear to one 'old comrade', Tom McEwen, that I wasn't quitting the party because of the vindictive things he had spread around about me. It was mainly that I couldn't stomach the way people were being treated for disagreeing with the party decisions. I said that I hoped I was wrong in my decision but that I wouldn't stay in the party under these conditions.

At one point I wrote out my position in full, saying what I thought was haywire in this or that. The party leadership didn't want me to circulate that letter to party members, but I gave copies to anyone I thought might read it. I ran across some who wouldn't even accept that statement from me. That is a terrible state to have gotten to, regardless of who or what it is, when people are afraid to even read someone else's ideas.

In general there was a fairly good relationship between me and party members in the union, although there were some nagging differences. I made it plain that I'd be prepared to maintain whatever relationships they wanted. If they wanted to continue their support I'd welcome it. But that if they were going to challenge me on my work in the union simply because I was no longer in the party then they had better beware. Because I think I could have mobilized enough support within the union to have defeated any challenge to my leadership - so we had better work together as well as we could.

The only time I felt let down was when the party failed to come to our support when we tried to organize the Nova Scotia fishermen. On the local level, at the Sydney Labour Council, people were doing all they could to support us in that struggle. I met trade unionists in Nova Scotia among miners and steel workers and others who under different conditions ought to have been in the party but who because of past disputes weren't. 'This is what happens when a kind of sectarianism takes hold of a party and it fragments,' I thought.

I also ran across people in the Maritimes who had come up from the United States and whose families had been party members or sympathizers. They were quite embittered about the way in which 'democratic centralism' had been misused to suppress 'internal democracy', as they put it. Some of them were probably the most anti-Communist Party people I'd ever run into.

I remember having discussions with people in this East Coast Socialist movement during the period I was in Nova Scotia. These weren't people I'd consider to be loonies or phonies. They were very concerned about the dangers of permitting any sort of an elite to develop within their organization. They were dealing in their own way with what has been referred to as the 'cult of personality'. To prevent that from happening they carried it to such an extreme that there was virtually no accepted leadership. In my discussions with them I could see that they had within themselves the mechanism for blowing the whole thing to hell. Because none of them would abide by any form of discipline or agreement whereby if they had differences amongst themselves they would continue to trash them out without splitting up. So today there is no such thing as the East Coast Socialist Movement. They've disappeared.
It's happened to an awful lot of people I've known in my life. People who were part and parcel of the left, have departed and have tried almost every experiment under the sun and really have gotten nowhere.

Maybe perfectionism is a root cause of many difficulties within the left. A lot of people, including myself, have had difficulty with that at one time or another. If you are committed to the visions of an organization like the Communist party and then find the varied and widespread imperfections of people in the actual party, it can create problems. I wrestled with that and finally came to the view, "It's a human organization after all. It's going to have imperfections. It's going to have people who make use of positions they're elected to perpetuate their personal outlook. Whatever policies are established by the party won't necessarily be carried out in the proper or best way. The Communist Party isn't and never has been an organization of perfect people."

Okay, everybody understands that. But its surprising how many people, when they are dissatisfied with something, will phrase their expectations in terms which essentially demand perfection. Their objections are based on a form of perfectionism - things should not have gone this way or that way - without recognizing the circumstances and constraints which applied at the given moment. But if you seriously want to change the society you're living in you have to start with what you have. If you believe that there has to be a transformation of the economic system you work from what you've got to change it.

About the only meaningful response I got from people who were still in the Communist party was "As long as you don't make your disagreements with the party into a public debate you are welcome to come back and fight for your views. But you don't provide leadership for the working class and you don't improve the party by just quitting it."

Ultimately I became convinced of that, although I'm still not convinced that things were done with the best interests of the working people of Canada in mind. I think that for a long time the party was just copying what Communist parties in other countries, evolving under other conditions had developed.

When I got back into the party I found that those who hadn't left were very suspicious of me. There were a lot of people who held their prejudices very strongly if you disagreed with the party's official position on what had happened in Europe or somewhere else. They couldn't seem to rise above that. I've had it said to me since that I was being marginalized by those who were in the leadership then. I've been told recently that some people now think that they might have done well to listen to the things I and many others were saying at the time. But that is getting ahead of the story, which is what happened when the UFAWU got into organizing fishermen in the Maritimes.
16.

THE SHORES OF NOVA SCOTIA

On the Grounds

How the U.F.A.W.U got involved in organizing fishermen on the East Coast was certainly a departure for us. At that time there were no real fishermen's unions in the Maritimes. None.

Our first serious discussions about organizing in the Maritimes were held during our 1966 annual convention. Later that year four of us made a trip through the Maritimes, visiting the fishing ports and talking to the labour organizations in the various regions. During that trip we got a sense of real possibility. I had the feeling that once the leadership was provided union organization would emerge from the ranks of the east coast fishermen themselves. Naturally it would have its ups and downs, failures as well as successes, but that a real possibility for organizing existed there.

The main argument against it was financial. Did we have the resources and staff to get the drive going? Should we be taking it on in view of the fact that the industry wasn't fully organized here in British Columbia? Some of our members argued, "If they want to be organized let them organize on their own. We did it on our own, so why should we get involved on the east coast?" There was always less money available than we needed for staff right here. There was some trepidation among everybody involved, certainly myself.

We had fishermen in our union who had come out here from the east coast to fish. Perhaps they were the most difficult to convince. Some of them felt, from their own experiences, that organization would never take hold in the Maritimes. That fishermen there were too individualistic and fought amongst each other too much to be able to form a union that would hold together. We were going to be wasting our time, some said. It was a difficult argument to counter because none of us were as familiar with the conditions there as they were.

Then there was the question of how the C.L.C. would respond to our organizing in the Maritimes. They had parcelled out spheres of jurisdiction to various bodies - even where there was nothing organized as yet. There would always be unions which, once we'd laid the foundations, might want to move in and take over. We were conscious of the possibility that the Seafarers International might be used against us in raids after we had gotten an organization going. But by then the S.I.U. had become almost totally discredited in the eyes of the entire labour movement.

During our initial discussions in Nova Scotia we had gotten a warm welcome from the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour and the Trades and Labour Councils in Halifax and Sydney. The recurrent comment was, 'No one's tried to organize the fishermen for over twenty years and nobody here wants to tackle it. The only thing that we don't want you to do is to interfere in any way, shape or form with the Canadian Seafood Workers Union. They had the cannery and shoreworkers organized in some places.
Roy Keefe was the moving force in the Canadian Seafood Workers. He had done a lot of the early organizational work on an old motorcycle, on the go day and night. From what people told me he was the one mainly responsible for setting up whatever organization existed in the Nova Scotia fish plants.

I assured the Seafood Workers union that, "We're not out to raid organizations that already exist. We want to organize the fishermen here." Roy said that he would welcome the idea because he didn't think that the Canadian Seafood Workers were capable of organizing the fishermen in the foreseeable future. They were still a small union with a few thousand members and there was a lot of organizational work for them to do amongst the shoreworkers yet.

We agreed that if there were shoreplants where we could organize we would try to steer organization into the Canadian Seafood Workers Union. Our goal was to organize fishermen delivering into organized plants. If we succeeded we would have a firm base where the fishermen would be in our union and the shoreworkers would be in the Canadian Seafood Workers. Then, as we moved to areas where there was no organization at all, we could work together. We didn't expect it would be accomplished overnight, not by a long shot.

The UFAWU committed itself to begin organizing in Nova Scotia during our annual convention in January or February of 1967. So it took us about a year to mull it over. We were able to send two organizers, Tom Parkin and Ted Foort, to start with. They began to set up local organizing committees among the fishermen and bring out local people who would take on the job of organizing. The focus of organizational work was on the fleets of the larger vessels, on the big draggers and scallopers and so forth. But we signed up small boat fishermen as well - lobster fishermen and people who had small long line boats. They don't have the same kind of small boat fleet as in B.C. but there are 'day boats' which would go out in the morning, set their gear and come back at night.

Shortly after having started we got involved in that tough strike at Prince Rupert and had to pull back one of our organizers from the Maritimes. So for the better part of a year we weren't able to invest much effort in Nova Scotia and for a year after that I was in jail.

After I came out I decided to go to the Maritimes and spend a good block of time there. So in the late winter of 1968/69 I travelled down to Lunenburg and around to other places in that part of the province and then up to Lewisburg. We called in at all kinds of ports along the Bay of Fundy and along the other shores of Nova Scotia and held meetings in these communities. At each place the groundwork had been already laid by Ted Foort and Tom Parkin and in some cases local organizing committees and executives had already been established. Jim Allen drove us through snow storms from one fishing port to the next. Going in and having discussions and then on to the next meeting. I came away with the feeling that it wouldn't be too long before the possibility would be there to take the companies on.

Resolutions had already been drafted by local organizing committees in some places but in others people were still tossing around ideas of what should be done. Some of them suggested that the UFAWU hire ten organizers immediately and put out our own
newspaper and that we needed this and we needed that. All of which would amount to a hundred or two hundred thousand dollars a year, which we simply didn't have. Some of the Nova Scotia fishermen had visions of our union being a huge, powerful organization which had endless amounts of funds and could perform miracles overnight.

I tried to point out that this all had to be taken step by step. That a lot of the organizational work would have to be done without us seeing any immediate results, until we were strong enough to take something on. I could provide some leadership and try to figure out some of the pitfalls before they came to them. We'd give them every assistance we could but they'd have to carry the ball for organizing themselves.

A number problems were evident immediately. Some people who I thought were the most active and promising didn't want to take on the job of organizing. They felt capable as fishermen but they had doubts about doing organizational work. So we didn't always get those who were most capable of leadership actually doing it at first.

For example, the local organizing committee had elected Jim Allen as chairman and he had agreed to take on the job. Jim was a good hearted sort of guy but he just didn't have the acumen of knowing how to go about organizing. Everybody said, 'That's the man we want'. But after a while they began to criticize him because he couldn't deliver what they wanted. It was the usual thing - expecting mountains of results from a single man. Then members would whisper tales that he should have done this and he shouldn't have done that. Which didn't encourage other people to get into organizational work.

We didn't find the people who could do the job until we actually got into the battle at Canso. That place wasn't picked by us and we didn't know how it would turn out.

In early February, 1970, we brought representatives of the organizing committees in Nova Scotia to our annual convention in Vancouver. One of them was Con Mills from Lewisburg, who seemed to me one of the people who could make a good organizer. Similarly, Edison Lumsden and Everett Richardson and a few others. Just before the convention adjourned Con reported that feelings were building up in Canso and Petite de Grat and Mulgrave. He felt that there could be a confrontation between the fishermen and the companies there at any time. I listened very closely to what Con had to say because he wasn't the kind of guy who made a speech to hear himself talk.

I said to him afterwards, "Whatever you do try to hold it off. For a few weeks at least. We're going to be tied up in contract negotiations here in B.C. and it will be one hell of a time for any of the officers to get away." Con answered, "I'm not going to say what's going to happen." It wasn't long afterwards that we got a telegram that the strike was on there.

When the fight started it started in Petit de Grat. Earl Lewis, the manager of the Booth Fisheries plant there, had been asked to begin negotiations with the local fishermen and had flatly refused. They had a number of local grievances and wanted to start negotiations toward a collective agreement. In refusing he used language which the French-Canadian fishermen there took as a calculated insult. That was the final straw. They walked off the boats and called on the Canso and the Mulgrave fishermen to do likewise.
So we had a strike involving two companies with about three hundred fishermen and their families. A strike not of our choosing or timing. A strike in an industry which contained thousands of fishermen in Nova Scotia alone and with no immediate prospects of being able to expand the strike. We were faced with the prospect of trying to win the strike locally, with thousands of fishermen throughout the province still delivering fish. Trying to win the strike against two multinational companies, one of which was part of the Grimsby group of Hull, England, and the other one tied in with Continental Foods in the United States.

We realized that we had one hell of a battle ahead. And yet, the feelings and the strength of the community - men, women and children - prepared to take on anything and everything, was so strong that it appeared it would be possible to win.

At Petit de Grat the shoreworkers had taken virtually their entire treasury and turned it over to the fishermen's organizing committee to help them in the first stages of the strike. During a meeting of the shoreworkers they seemed to be as determined as the fishermen were about trying to get a contract. There were often close family ties between the fishermen and the shoreworkers; the husbands or fathers or brothers working on the boats and other members of the family employed in the plant.

We had approached the Conservative government of Nova Scotia for changes in the Labour Code which would provide commercial fishermen with the same protection as any other workers. But that was not forthcoming. So, as we were organizing we were fully aware that the existing legislation was going to provide no protection to us and that if common law prevailed then anything we did could be considered a "restraint of trade". We were back at the stage where any collective action by fishermen could be considered criminal.

There was a 'Fishermen's Act' which had been passed in the aftermath of the defeat of the Canadian Fishermen's Union twenty years earlier. But it was an act mainly aimed at preventing organization amongst fishermen. The gist of this Act was that you had to have organized a majority of the fishermen in one of four geographic areas, regardless of what they were fishing or who they were fishing for, to get any sort of recognition. And even then it wasn't recognition as a trade union. The Act contained all sorts of barriers to collective job action and didn't provide the protection of trade union legislation. It was anything but labour legislation.

There was also the question whether we, coming from outside these fishing communities, might be seen as outsiders. We ran into some of that once the fight got going, not so much from fishermen but from those who were opposed to the union anyway. But there was also a strong feeling among fishermen there that "If you're prepared to stick with us we're going to go the route."

Jim Collins and others at Mulgrave were talking about how they were going to survive. How much money they could expect from the strike fund.

"We don't have a big strike fund in the UFAWU," I told them. "We'll make an appeal to our locals and to the general treasury and see what we can get. I'm sure they'll
contribute quite generously but it's not going to be enough to provide for everyone during the strike.

"Well, how much?"
"We'll have to see what we can get from our membership and then make an appeal to other unions as well."

The funds available worked out to something like ten dollars a week for single men and twenty dollars a week for married men with families. The question was raised, "How long can we stay on strike this way?"

"It's up to you to decide," I told them. "If you're thinking about a few days or weeks we should pack it in right now. Because it seems to me that the companies are prepared to wait us out."

Having recently been through that long strike in Prince Rupert I was aware that the companies wouldn't give way before three or four months at the earliest. That it might take longer than that if those two companies were determined to fight us tooth and nail. But despite those harsh prospects the overwhelming majority of fishermen were saying "No matter how long it takes, we're going to stay on strike until we win this one." There were a few exceptions but they weren't being vocal about it.

The strike was really a vicious thing. At one point Acadia Fisheries at Canso ran trucks through and into the picket line. Our members were arrested for obstructing these trucks or for public mischief over the most minor things. There was always something coming up. Emergency calls came in day and night.

We had set up a Fishermen's Council with five fishermen's representatives from each of the three struck ports. On one occasion we were in a meeting at Mulgrave when the phone rang and we got word that all hell was breaking loose in Canso. I tried to say, "Before we all rush down there let's first get some idea of what we're going to do." But before I'd finished saying that they were rushing to their cars, the hall had emptied and I was left standing alone.

The police had sent in a large force drawn from other parts of the county and were down at the picket line ready to drag people off to jail. The situation was so tight that it could easily have developed into a riot. The whole town was out and there would have been a real melee if the police had tried to carry out arrests at that point. But, wisely, the R.C.M.P. thought better of it.

The companies had gotten ex parte injunctions shortly after the strike started which virtually prohibited picketing. We tried to get legal counsel to have those injunctions lifted, but with no success. It was very difficult for us to get lawyers in Nova Scotia, period. Most lawyers were members of either the Liberal or the Conservative parties. That was the way they worked.

We didn't have many expectations of getting the injunctions lifted in the courts. Still, we continued picketing, knowing full well that at some point any of us could be cited for contempt of court. At least I did. But I'm not certain if I ever got it across to all of the people involved, despite having repeatedly warned them that it was a real possibility that
they had to consider. However the injunctions sat unused for quite a time until they were enforced on a whole host of fishermen who were picketing.

To my surprise, I wasn't served with the injunction but I eventually went and asked to be served. In my lifetime I've been served with many court injunctions of one kind or another and I never went looking for one. But the story was being spread around that I was using these fishermen as pawns. That they were being dragged before the court while I was hiding out. I thought that the only way to counter that was to have the court serve me with the injunction papers. They had them all made out and ready for me.

We had met with the Premier to propose some changes in the labour code which would allow us to picket but we didn't get to square one. So we decided to see if we could get the Federal government to move on the question of certification for fishermen. The rationale was that it hadn't yet been decided which government had jurisdiction over the off shore fisheries.

Myself and about a dozen of the Nova Scotia fishermen went to Ottawa and met with Bryce Mackasey, the Federal Minister of Labour, as well as with the leaders of the opposition parties. But we didn't get anywhere. The Liberal government had made commitments to the fish companies on the Atlantic coast that before any legislation facilitating unionization in the fishing industry was implemented there would be hearings before the Standing Committee on Labour of the House. That under no circumstances would we get a decision at this time.

At the end of our lobbying trip to Ottawa a number of us were asked by reporters what results we'd had and what we intended to do now. Everett Richardson, who was afisherman on one of the draggers from Canso, said "I guess I'll be going back on the picket line." That appeared in a small story in the Ottawa press but it later became an issue in the contempt of court case against the fishermen.

Some Amazing Developments

When the court in Nova Scotia decided to proceed with its contempt citations, they sent police officers to each of the picket lines to read the court injunction against picketing and to make a further statement to the effect that "If you fail to obey this injunction action will be executed to enforce it." Having done that at each of the picket lines they then arrested fifteen of the Mulgrave fishermen and hauled them up before one Judge Cowan. Cowan demanded that they promise not to return to picket. None of the fishermen would do that so he sentenced them to twenty and thirty days in jail.

The fishermen who were arrested at Canso came before the judge three or four days later. In the course of those hearings Judge Cowan decided that he was going to get a statement out of somebody. He dressed down our lawyer and demanded that he make these people come to their senses.

The lawyer we finally got to take the case on was a fellow from Sydney by the name of O'Connell and he was doing his best under very difficult circumstances. During a brief adjournment he explained to the Canso fishermen that they could be in for even longer sentences. He warned me that I'd better stay out of the courtroom because the judge was
hostile enough to sentence me on the spot. "The way this is going there is nothing to stop him from sending you up for two years in Dorchester." But there was no way I could or would leave at that point.

At the end of the adjournment the judge wanted to know if O'Connell had gotten a commitment that the fishermen wouldn't go back and picket. "No." Then the judge says, "You're just dealing with the pawns here. There's the person we should be dealing with," and he nodded towards me. "You - Homer Stevens - stand up," he barked. So I stood up.

I'm paraphrasing what he said but it was to the effect that, 'I know full well that these people are just the pawns in the game. You tell them that they are not to go back on the picket line and this matter will be resolved.'

I had to be circumspect in my answer. "Your honour - I think you have a mistaken idea of my role. I'm not here to order them what to do. I don't give orders, I take orders from the membership. They make their own decisions, individually and together."

O'Connell who was sitting beside me, nudged me in the knee, warning me to shut up. I think he was convinced that I was going to get jailed right then and there.

There was another short adjournment, after which the judge sentenced all of those arrested on the picket line to terms in jail. Most of them got sentences of a month to three months, but Everett Richardson was sentenced to nine months. A gasp went through the room. It was not only the length of the sentence but the way the judge pronounced it. He said he'd seen smirks at the sentences he'd imposed and that this man had earlier boasted to reporters that he would return to the picket line. He was going to teach them a lesson. Everett Richardson was going to get nine months and anybody who came before him on the same charge would get even more.

So first the Mulgrave fishermen had been sentenced and then those from Canso. The next group scheduled to go up before judge Cowan were the Petit de Grat fishermen. They figured that they were in for even heavier sentences.

But in the interval, in the space of the few days since the people from Canso were sentenced, something extraordinary had happened. It's almost unbelievable that I was in the middle of it and still didn't appreciate the effect of what the women had been doing was having.

I was staying with Jim and Kay Collins in Mulgrave at the time and Jim called me for breakfast. It was about seven in the morning when I came down and he says, "Doesn't it look beautiful outside?"

I looked out the window and it looked like any other day to me.

"Can't you see how beautiful it is?" he says.

"I don't know what you mean Jim."

"You don't see any smoke coming out of the stacks of the pulp mill do you," he says.

That was my first realization that they had actually, successfully, shut it down.

There had been informational picketing by the women - primarily the wives and daughters and children of the fishermen on strike. They had been out on informational pickets just about everywhere. The women and kids just went out on the roadways leading to the mills and work sites around there with cardboard signs reading "Please help
the fishermen" Or "Why is my daddy in jail?" and whatever appeals they could think of. If they had put their appeals on the normal strike basis I don't know if they would have gotten the kind of support they did.

It was an appeal to the sympathy and support of other workers against the courts putting their husbands and fathers in jail for no good reason. And the workers there did respond to that appeal. After discussions among themselves and in their unions they just walked off the job. They decided to shut her down - and that was it. It rapidly became a virtual general strike in that region without one ever being declared.

The pulp mill in Canso came to a stand still, and so did the heavy water plant at Port Hawksbury. The miners in Cape Breton had begun to come out. The steelworkers, with the exception of those who were necessary to keep the furnaces going, were walking out at the steel mill. Even some of the construction sites were coming to a standstill. It just swept the whole region.

The Steelworkers local in Cape Breton had just elected a new leadership which had a fresh outlook on what union solidarity meant. It was the workers and the local union leadership in the region who were behind us. Not the national executives of their unions - anything but.

That wave of sympathy strikes has never been understood or even known about in the rest of Canada. But they just about shut down all the major operations in the region. They were ready to push it into the rest of Nova Scotia.

It was time for the Petit de Grat fishermen to go into court to face their contempt citations. I have never in my life seen such a change of attitude in a judge as happened there. Judge Cowan made an opening statement to the effect that he had never been anti-labour and that he had never wanted to jail anyone. He did everything but apologize. He released the entire Petit de Grat group with no sentences whatsoever.

Obviously a message must have come down from above. The provincial government didn't want to throw anybody else in jail in that situation. It was too explosive. The danger was that there would be a general strike in Nova Scotia if they jailed any more fishermen for picketing.

Two days later, when we were at New Glasgow, to meet with representative of unions called together by the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, we heard that the judge had also released Everett Richardson and the others he had previously sentenced. Some of them had spent ten days or so in jail. They were released and never brought back to serve time.

The sympathy walk outs in Cape Breton had lasted about three to four days and were terminated at that meeting in New Glasgow. A committee of the top union executives in Nova Scotia got everybody back to work with the argument that if we didn't get something positive from a Commission of Inquiry that had been created they could start the work stoppage up again. That undercut the wide spread support for the fishermen that was developing.

A one man Commission of Inquiry into disputes in the fishing industry was already under way, headed by another judge named Green. He held meetings around the province.
and in each of the three places where the strike was on. But the hearings turned out to be a farcical kind of thing.

When the report of this Inquiry came out it recommended that the issue of union certification for fishermen be considered in depth at some future date, that in the meantime contracts be negotiated between the companies and committees of local fishermen without the UFAWU gaining recognition. We could give advice but the contracts would not recognize the UFAWU as the legal bargaining agent for the fishermen. A further limitation was that the negotiations would only cover the crewmen on the draggers. The fishermen on the inshore boats who had joined us wouldn't be included. The result was that our membership said, "No way." If there were going to be negotiations the inshore fishermen would have to be included.

Throughout the strike there were some fishermen who went down to the Great Lakes to look for work, stayed there a while and then came back. People who stayed behind felt that these others shouldn't leave without first getting permission, and then they should make a contribution to the strike fund if they got work. There was continuous argument about that. Some of those who left to get work elsewhere would at times be dubbed 'scabs', which they really weren't. They certainly weren't scabbing by producing fish for the struck companies. But at times it meant that we didn't have the numbers of people on the picket line that we should have had.

By now we were faced with a growing difficulty.: some of our people were beginning to get to the stage where, while they wouldn't turn their backs on the strike, they were becoming hopeless about ever getting a settlement. They weren't prepared to fish under those conditions but they began to take other jobs. It was difficult to know how much longer they could keep on.

**In the Cod End**

About that time we got a phone call from Joe Morris, the secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress. The UFAWU was still suspended from the C.L.C. and despite a growing pressure from other unions for our re-admission the C.L.C. executive had been dead set against us at their previous convention. But Morris told us that the C.L.C. and the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour were prepared to guarantee that no union affiliated with them would attempt to raid us if we negotiated a contract with the companies which didn't include full recognition of our union. The proposition was that when legislation extending certification rights to fishermen was achieved in Nova Scotia we would have clear sailing.

Knowing Joe Morris, naturally I had suspicions about that guarantee from day one. But once we had a public commitment from the C.L.C. I thought it would be difficult for them to back out of it. We took that proposition to the membership and debated it at some length and finally decided that we should get the contracts signed and try for union recognition later.

The negotiations with the companies were quite protracted and it was early November before we got the contracts signed. But we came out of them with conditions which were
reasonable in the estimation of our members, both in terms of the share agreements and the prices to be paid for the fish. A daily minimum wage was written into the contract and the companies agreed to pay half the cost of the Canada Pension Plan. We only got a very limited seniority system but there was an agreement that the companies would have to draw from the crews as they had existed at the start of the dispute. The strike had lasted into the beginning of November of 1970 for a total of seven months.

Then, at the end of that year, we were hit by a raid. After the contracts were signed and the boats were out fishing again we suddenly got word that Booth Fisheries had voluntarily recognized the 'Meat Cutters Union' as the bargaining agent for its employees and the 'Meat Cutters' had filed for certification. The 'Meat Cutters' apparently had been dealing behind the scenes with Booth Fisheries even while we were negotiating contracts.

To know how that was possible you have to know what happened on the political scene in Nova Scotia. There was a snap provincial election in late fall of 1970 and the Liberal party under Gerald Regan had turned the Conservative government out of office. The new Liberal government rushed through changes in the labour code in regards to fishermen and almost overnight the whole situation changed. So the next stage of the battle got going in early 1971.

Here we had the fishermen on the fleets of those two companies under a signed contract but the 'Meat Cutters' were granted the rights to represent them by the Nova Scotia Department of Labor. They were granted certification for fishermen who they had never even contacted let alone organized. There was a clause in the Nova Scotia labour law which said that if an employer voluntarily recognized a bargaining agent for his employees there didn't have to be a certification vote. The provincial Department of Labour had the right to grant or not grant union certification and to require or not require a vote by the employees on who they wanted to represent them. We tried to appeal that to the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board but with no success.

At Petite de Grat the 'Meat Cutters' did sign up a sufficient number of fishermen to carry out a successful raid. You would have to be a part of that community to really know the ins and outs of how that turnabout happened and why. But in a long, drawn-out strike like this one was almost anything can happen.

Petite de Grat was a small and in some ways an isolated place and the church's influence was very strong. There was a Catholic priest there who at the outset of the campaign was active in collecting money to help the striking fishermen. But he later made a complete turnabout. He set about to convince people in the community that they should get rid of 'that west coast, Communist-led' union. And he succeeded.

Towards the end, not only the fishermen but also the Petit de Grat local of the Canadian Seafood Workers Union had almost severed connections with their own union. From being very strongly behind the strike they swung to a position where their spokesmen came out in the press opposing us at every turn.

A deep split developed within that community. There were fishermen at Petit de Grat who wouldn't go along with what was happening. Those who continued to support us there were told that they might as well get lost as far as jobs were concerned. As a result
some of them, like Alfonse and Cletus Samson, ultimately came out to the west coast and fished there.

That was the first break. The Acadia Fisheries tried to do the same thing in Canso and Mulgrave but they couldn't convince the fishermen there to go back on the boats. So they began to fire entire dragger crews and replace them with crews they brought in from Newfoundland and elsewhere. More than once, when the Canso fishermen got to the replacement crews and talked to them, the new crews would walk off too. Then they'd be replaced by another crew which was flown in from some other place in the Maritimes.

Acadia Fisheries had shut their Mulgrave plant down and their dragger fleet brought the fish into Canso. We set up mass picket lines at their operations there but we weren't successful in shutting them down.

We took the actions of Acadia Fisheries before the Nova Scotia Labour Board as a blatant case of unfair labour practices but when we got before that Board it was clear what we could expect. The lawyers for the 'Meat Cutters' and representatives of the Canadian Labour Congress had their heads together with the lawyers for Acadia Fisheries. The Labour Board simply refused to hear our case. Since they wouldn't hear that case we tried to get them to order a certification vote for the fishermen at Canso and Mulgrave. But we didn't get that either.

We then mounted a demonstration in Halifax led by Canso fishermen and supported by trade unionists in that city and also by some Dalhousie students. We went into the Legislature and raised hell. But about the only ones in the Legislature who were prepared to say anything in support of the fishermen on strike were Gerry Ackerman, the N.D.P. leader, and a fellow by the name of Paul McEwen from Cape Breton.

After that we were raided up and down the line by the 'Meat Cutters.' It was now in the early spring of 1971 and we were unable to carry on any longer. Finally we had to admit that we couldn't make it. We urged our members at Canso to join the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway and Transport Workers Union; their Marine Division had signed up and gotten contracts for some trawler crews around Lunenburg and Lockport. There had been some hard feelings about that while we were organizing but we still felt it was better for our members to go into a Canadian union than to be taken over by an American International.

We tried to get a contract in one other region, to see if we could retain a toehold in Nova Scotia. That was at Meteghan, down in the Bay of Fundy. We had a majority of the fishermen fishing for Comeau Seafoods signed up there but the lawyer for the company challenged our application for certification by rounding up three or four fishermen who swore on affidavit that they hadn't paid their union dues. They didn't deny that they'd signed application forms to join the union, just that they hadn't actually paid their dues. The purpose was to throw doubt on how many people we actually had signed up.

"They'll never make that stick," we said. But the Nova Scotia Labour Board brought those four fishermen in and the company lawyer begins cross examining our organizers, Con Mills and Edison Lumsden, who'd signed them up. 'How had they paid their dues and what denomination of bills had they used?' It was a ludicrous line of questioning but
the company lawyer made it appear that our organizers had cooked something up. Nevertheless, I thought that even the Nova Scotia Labour Board wasn't going to accept that kind of ploy. But they did. They refused certification on the grounds that we had falsified the membership records. The signatures of all those fishermen we'd signed up were simply considered invalid.

With the Labour Board decisions loaded against us it seemed that we would never win certification in Nova Scotia, no matter what we did. We had to accept that the UFAWU couldn't carry through organizational work there. I felt very downhearted. After all the sacrifices that so many people had made we still hadn't been able to establish a union there.

I've tried to examine my own motives as to whether there were elements of egoism involved in what I was doing. I've had people charge me with that. One of them was Fred Dowling, the former head of the Packinghouse Workers and then an officer of the 'Meat Cutters', who was gloating over our defeat. He said that I should have recognized from the start that there was no hope of us carrying through our organizing efforts among Nova Scotia fishermen. That our union didn't have the funds or backing to achieve it.

But the conditions of fishermen on the east coast were just crying out for organization. It would have been good if one of the bigger unions had been willing to go in and spend the money and effort needed, but they wouldn't. It was the UFAWU, with its very limited resources, that went in and got things rolling.

But mostly I remember the words of a guy like Eric Fitzpatrick. He and his wife and their kids took a hell of a beating in that strike. Earlier on I had asked him, "How do you see all this? Does it make any sense?" And he answered,"I don't know if we'll make it. Nothing may come out of it. But at least for once in my life I've done what I thought was right."

Though it may not have seemed like it at the time that struggle did awaken a sense of the need for organization among fishermen throughout the region. Organizational efforts were made in New Brunswick later and the Maritime Fishermen's Union came into being there. In Newfoundland, what started as a deal cut between the 'Meatcutters' and the fish companies evolved into an union organization completely different from its parent body. The Newfoundland Fishermen and Allied Workers Union have organized most of the fish plants and larger fish boats there and under Richard Cashin have fought some pretty militant battles.

Though they've got a ways to go yet, a whole new chapter opened up for fishermen in the Maritimes. There is still that lingering feeling that we failed. But it wasn't a total failure.
Back in the C.L.C.

While the organizational battle was still going on in Nova Scotia there were other
developments which eventually saw the UFAWU re-admitted into the Canadian Labour
Congress. There had been a tremendous debate at the 1970 C.L.C. convention in
Edmonton with resolutions coming from a whole range of unions calling for our re-
admission. When they hit the floor of the convention Donald McDonald, the president of
the C.L.C. at the time, simply dismissed these resolutions.

While the B.C. Federation of Labour resolution supporting the UFAWU was defeated
by McDonald and his crew it created a real turmoil. The resolution which the B.C. Fed
passed came close to saying that if the C.L.C. didn't re-admit us then they, the B.C.
Federation of Labour, would admit us themselves at their next conference. If they did the
C.L.C. would then either have to take action against the whole B.C. Federation of Labour
or let their re-admission of us stand.

So, in 1973 we got word that if we would undertake certain agreements with the C.L.C.
there was a good likelihood that we'd be re-admitted. At first we figured that the C.L.C.
executive was just responding to the pressure by their member unions. That they'd have a
meeting with us and find some reason why we couldn't come to an agreement. But when
we went to Ottawa we found that instead of being treated as this terrible enemy, as we'd
been portrayed in the past, the C.L.C. was ready to re-admit us.

Mainly what they wanted to know was whether we were going to organize outside of
B.C. They told us that they wanted us to stay away from areas where other unions were
already organized or were organizing. By this time it wasn't a practical possibility for us
to organize outside of B.C. so we undertook that agreement and were re-admitted into the
C.L.C.

The first B.C. Federation of Labour convention we attended as members was in the fall
of 1973. It was a great feeling to be back inside again. In the past we had tried to get
resolutions put forward on such things as bargaining rights for fishermen. But it was very
difficult to get support from other unions as long as we were outside the C.L.C.

We were part of the left-center stream of unions in the B.C. Fed. and we could never
get our candidates elected to the top positions. But we now had the possibility of putting
our positions forward among organized labour. Event hough our influence was not that
great it made some difference on what policies they adopted on a range of issues.

My conviction has always been that where there are unorganized workers unions
should be active in trying to organize them - and not necessarily just workers in their own
industry. I felt that unions should lend a hand to get the unorganized organized regardless
of whether that particular union benefited from it or not. There is still a large body of
working people in Canada in unorganized occupations. There are farmworkers and
service workers and others working on piece rates who desperately need some kind of union protection to improve their conditions but who initially can't manage it on their own.

All too often there has been no major effort on the part of unions to put their resources together to organize those sectors that have remained unorganized. To me, that should be one of the main roles of the regional Labour Councils and of the Canadian Labour Congress. They do put some effort into organizing drives at times but often there's a narrow partisanship involved. The attitude is often, 'What's in it for our union? Are we going to get more members and dues out of it if we succeed?' That's destructive, to put organizing on a 'cash on the barrelhead' basis.

An example of that occurred shortly after the UFAWU was re-admitted to the C.L.C. It had to do with the possibility of trying to organize lake fishermen. The fresh water fishermen and fish plant workers in the whole region from the Great Lakes to the Rockies, including the fisheries in the Northwest Territories, were getting a real shellacking by a crown corporation called the Fresh Water Fish Marketing Corporation. It was a Crown corporation had been set up to handle the commercial fish taken mainly by native fishermen in the bigger lakes and river systems - Lake Winnipeg, Athabasca, Great Slave Lake and some of the northern rivers.

There had been a strike at Lake Athabasca over the price of Whitefish, which was their main catch, where they got an increase from six cents a pound to ten cents a pound. They had struck because they couldn't afford to fish for six cents a pound. The UFAWU got a call to help out and we met with some of the fishermen at Hay River and in Winnipeg.

A delegation of these lake fishermen came to our convention in 1974 and there was a discussion about whether we could organize those fisheries on our own. We'd recently had the experience of being left stranded in the Nova Scotia fisheries. Trying to organize the lake fisheries would have been a costly undertaking, with the distances involved and the need to charter planes to get into many of these isolated places. So we decided we'd approach the Alberta, the Saskatchewan and the Ontario Labour Councils as well as to the C.L.C., saying that we didn't have the financial resources to handle the organizational task alone but that it was a job that needed doing.

In the process of making that appeal we took two of the representatives of the lake fishermen to the Canadian Labour Congress. Both of them were Metis, one from Great Slave Lake and the other from Hay River. When these two native fishermen first saw the C.L.C. offices they felt that the ball was really going to get rolling. But as it turned out, it might have been better if we hadn't brought them along to experience the kind of financial haggling and questioning that the officers of the C.L.C. put them through - and then reject them. Because after that they were totally disillusioned with unions.

The Congress officers asked, "Well, how much money will you need and how likely is that you'll succeed and how do you envisage paying back this money for organizing purposes to the C.L.C.?" and so forth. To me it was like walking into a bank and asking for a loan. And to these two Metis fishermen it must have seemed even worse because it was not what they had expected from the biggest Congress of organized labour in Canada.
The UFAWU even said that we'd give our help to whatever union was prepared to take on that organizing job and would stand back and let that union represent those fishermen. But there was never a penny of help given through the C.L.C. So that organizing drive never got off the ground. Which is just a small example of why labour is not that well organized in Canada.

**The Reign of Virtue**

When the N.D.P. government was first elected in B.C. in 1972 the general feeling amongst most working people was one of tremendous enthusiasm. After forty years of campaigning a Social Democratic government was at last in power in B.C. The feeling during the first year or so was that there would be few difficulties in getting some of the fundamental questions over union rights resolved.

I myself didn't think that there would be any problems in getting changes in Workers Compensation for fishermen enacted, especially since the N.D.P. had supported that year after year in their conventions. On some matters, such as changing the labour code to cover fishermen, I thought they might dilly dally around with for a while. But even I didn't think there would be a fundamental problem in getting the legislation passed. So the stonewalling we encountered in the N.D.P. caucus in Victoria was like a dash of cold water in our face.

Having observed what had happened in Saskatchewan over the years, my own reaction was that the C.C.F. there had made some major changes initially but after a while they'd settled down to business as usual, as far as the labour movement was concerned. It became pretty much the same as organized labour had experienced with any other government. But I must admit that I expected the N.D.P. in B.C. to go at least part of the way with the labour movement and see through at least a few of the changes they had previously committed themselves to. As it turned out, we had difficulty even in getting a meeting with the N.D.P. caucus. There was correspondence back and forth for three or four months trying to arrange a meeting. We wanted to talk about three items; the establishment of a Ministry of Fisheries, changes in the labour code to entrench bargaining rights for fishermen and establishment of universal Workers' Compensation. Finally got an appointment to meet first with the cabinet and then with the N.D.P. caucus. We took the entire General Executive Board of about twenty five people over to Victoria.

When we got there Dave Barrett welcomed us but said that because of the need to complete the government estimates he couldn't participate in the meeting. He left the chair in someone else's hands and he and most of the cabinet members left. We presented our brief, which was a short and straightforward document, reminding them of the fact that they had committed themselves to the three items we were pressing for while they'd been in the opposition. Everything was polite enough but everything was left hanging. We felt we were being dismissed.

In a later meeting with Barrett on another matter, I managed to raise our union's brief."You can't just dismiss us like that. You're going to lose a heck of a lot of support
amongst fishermen and their families. Most of the deputation which came over here are active members of the N.D.P. They're not a bunch of Reds, in case that's what you're worried about," I told him.

"No, no. I don't think that," said Dave.

It wasn't that major a departure that we were asking for. A Federal task force headed by a fellow called Wood had held that since the fish marketing was under the control of a limited number of companies, the operators of the plants would be deemed to be the employers and the fishermen deemed to be employees for the purposes of unemployment insurance. So we had already managed to have that formula accepted by the Federal government for unemployment insurance.

But nothing I could say could convince him to implement the legislative changes they'd previously supported. It soon became clear that their priorities didn't include ours. During the N.D.P.'s entire term of office they never did come through with the changes in the labour code necessary to entrench bargaining rights for fishermen. So that left a pretty bitter taste in the mouths of our members.

The N.D.P. did redraft the Labour Code while they were in office. They corrected the situation where employers had been able to get some judge or other to issue one kind of injunction or another against unions in almost every labour dispute in B.C. They set up the Labour Relations Board and brought in legislation which required that industrial disputes go through that Board.

The trouble was that the powers of the Labour Relations Board they established were awfully wide ranging. It could levy fines and order injunctions like a court if its decisions were disobeyed. When the N.D.P. government was challenged on that by the labour movement they said, "We're not intending to use those powers that you're worried about against labour. After all, you should be able to trust us."

The labour movement as a whole answered that another government could be elected which would use those very provisions against the labour movement. Which is exactly what happened after the N.D.P. was defeated and another Socred government came in.

The new Labour Code specified that during the life of the contract there could be no job actions whatsoever, under any circumstances. The Labour Relations Board had the power to declare any job action, even those brought to enforce contract conditions, illegal. The Board could take steps up to and including unilateral decertification of entire unions if they engaged in job actions during the lifetime of a contract. So, if an employer refused to rectify some grievances or if he violated what the union understood to be a contract agreement no job action by the union would be legal until it came time to negotiate the next contract - which might be a couple of years down the road.

There was a sharp debate over the provisions of this new labour code at the next B.C. Federation of Labour convention. Bill King, the N.D.P. Minister of Labour, came and tried to sell it as the best labour legislation imaginable. But he didn't convince anybody. The overwhelming majority of unions were up in arms about it.

Somewhat later the N.D.P. government ordered the I.W.A. and a number of other unions on legal strikes back to work. Something like sixty thousand people were forced
back to work by legislative order without winning contracts. Naturally the employers weren't going to bargain seriously if they thought that the government would force their workers back to work when things got tough.

The N.D.P. also brought in an Essential Services Act which allowed the government to declare any labour dispute whatsoever as effecting an essential service. They could then order the union's members back to work. It was a sword hanging over all collective job action.

Len Guy, as head of the B.C. Federation of Labour, issued a public statement to the effect that, "Provincial governments come and go but labour has to be prepared to defend it's interests no matter which government is in power." That was a fundamental departure for the B.C. Fed and it showed how far support for the N.D.P. government had dropped among trade unionists. The N.D.P. was so frightened of appearing associated with the unions that they bent over backwards to keep us at arm's length. They felt they had to curry favour with those voters who might support them if they divorced themselves from the interests of the labour movement.

At the 1974 annual convention of the UFAWU Steve Stavenes tore into the N.D.P. cabinet minister who was sent to address us. Steve was the president of the union and a lifelong supporter of the CCF and NDP. He blew his top and said something like, "The Socreds have been in power for umpteen years. We expected that when the N.D.P. finally got into power we would begin to change some of these restrictions we've been living under. When do we get a kick at the cat?"

When it finally began to dawn on our members that none of the things which the N.D.P. had committed itself to doing about the fishing industry were going to be done - there was some real anger. They hadn't been able to believe that the party they had supported all those years and had trusted to bring in the necessary legislation was now evading it. In part, that accounted for what happened in the following election. Because the sense of betrayal was widespread among many unions. Instead of there being a deep determination that they just couldn't allow the N.D.P. government to be defeated there was a lackadaisical sort of support. There was a widespread feeling among trade unionists that the NDP wasn't that much different from other provincial governments.

The N.D.P. government did make some changes in things like social welfare policy and in providing protection for people through various review agencies - the Ombudsman's office and the Rental Review office and the Human Rights officer - which were of some benefit. And during their last few months in power the N.D.P. did finally bring in legislation extending Workers Compensation to fishermen, after a great deal of arm twisting on our part. Many of our members were still tagging along with the N.D.P. when the election was called in 1975. But there was a visible decline in support and the government was defeated.

After the defeat of the N.D.P. government there was a lot of discussion in the unions to the effect that 'We've got to get more of our people involved in influencing N.D.P. policy'. There were people who did that and managed to get some resolutions adopted. But
whether that will have any effect on an N.D.P. government when one is elected again remains to be seen.

The right wing of the N.D.P. tried to pin their defeat on 'having gone too far too fast'. They tried to gloss over the fact that they hadn't done anything on many of the fundamental issues which affected working people.

Local Control

Local control was a major theme in the N.D.P. philosophy, which they tinkered with in the delivery of certain government services. But it wasn't thought through and could wind up placing control in the hands of the most backward local elements.

Just prior to the election of the N.D.P. in B.C. there was talk that Ottawa might provide funds to get a North Coast Native Fishermen's Coop started. There were a dozen or so native villages involved: ranging from those in the Nass all the way down to Klemutu. They needed somewhere between eight and ten million dollars to get the thing off the ground. The UFAWU had passed policy resolutions supporting the establishment of this Native Fishermen's Co-op, but the Federal government backed out. After the N.D.P. were elected they approached the union, as the major fishermen's organization on the coast, on what our attitude was to the province funding this Co-op. We again took a position in favour.

Sometime in late 1973 Barrett approached me and asked if I was prepared to leave my job with the union to take on managing this Co-op once they'd set it up. I said I couldn't do that. But I told him that if they were serious about establishing a Co-op it was important that they lay down some fundamental rules to assure that the operation wouldn't be taken over by private interests in the future.

Barrett arranged a meeting in which four of the leaders of the North Coast Tribal Council came to Victoria and called me in to meet with them. I got the feeling that those who wound up becoming the directors of that Co-op weren't happy about me acting as a consultant. Allen Hall and Simon Reece asked me: "Was I looking for the job of running the Co-op?" "By no means." I said. "But I've been asked to consult on what would be useful in setting up the Co-op. If that's something you are going to resent maybe I shouldn't come." But they said that was alright.

There was discussion of what mix of boats should be built for the new Co-op. We were thinking about four or five modern packers and looking at the possibility of getting a dozen or so seiners attached to the operation. There was no specific limit on the number of gillnetters which might be joined to the Co-op but we were thinking of a fleet of a hundred or so gillnet boats. Enough vessels to provide production for a small but modern cannery which could pack an amount to make it commercially viable. The cannery itself was going to be built from scratch with modern equipment. It wasn't going to be some old plant that a company wanted to unload on the government. Over the next couple of years that plant was built at Port Simpson.

Alex Gordon and I worked up a series of recommendations on some critical features which should be incorporated in the Co-op. But when the Co-op was established we
found that none of the recommendations had been adhered to. For example, the whole question of boat ownership was crucial in order to avoid a situation where individuals would come into the Co-op on the basis of government financing and then, at some later date, simply take their boats and pull out, leaving the Co-op without the necessary production. To avoid that we had proposed that the Co-op retain majority ownership in each boat. But when the N.D.P. government financed them the boats were all handed over to private owners who could then do with them what they wanted.

Another recommendation was that there be an assurance of union organization among the Co-op shoreworkers and tendermen. But Barrett left the whole thing in the hands of the sorts of people prominent in the Native Brotherhood. The Co-op became basically a captive of that group and their policies. They pulled the most atrocious stunts to convince native workers that they should have nothing whatever to do with the UFAWU or any other union.

The workers in the Co-op plant never did have a proper contract. The basic wage rates paralleled ours but in terms of seniority and hiring and benefits - they just weren’t there. The Co-op management kept exclusive control over hiring and firing. A lot of the cohesiveness of shoreworkers in a plant centers on the question of seniority. When that is absent it leaves hiring and firing to the whim of management, and the plant workers have no job protection.

We had proposed that there be a built-in representation of Native women cannery workers on the Co-op Board. That was passed over too.

Economically, the financing of the Co-op was in no relation to their production. So it wasn’t long before that Co-op was flat broke. The provincial government then pumped in additional amounts of money but sometime after the N.D.P. was defeated the plant went into receivership. The plant was then leased to a private fish company which used it for some of their processing. So the hopes of those native communities which were riding on that Co-op went down the drain.

There was an even more flagrant misuse of the concept of Native fishing co-ops made at Bella Bella a few years later, which had nothing to do with the N.D.P. A private company called Milbanke Fisheries had established a small canning plant at Bella Bella and after some years of operation they announced that because of economic difficulties they were contemplating pulling out. They threatened that they definitely would close down if there was any industrial dispute there. Shortly after that the UFAWU, which represented the shoreworkers and many of the fishermen at Bella Bella, was suddenly apprised of the fact that Milbanke Fisheries had sold its entire operation to a new group which called itself the Central Coast Native fishermen’s Co-op. When we looked into this Co-op we found it had been heavily financed by the Marubeni Corporation, a huge fishing company from Japan. Marubeni had provided something like seven million dollars in start-up capital and had gotten first refusal of all fish brought in by the fishermen attached to the Co-op. It was an instant ‘Co-op’ which was largely controlled by a private company. That’s what it amounted to.
It was put to the Bella Bella people that the Co-op was their only salvation. A condition which had been laid down by their backer was 'No union'. That was what the whole thing turned on, that they would continue operating during a strike in the rest of the industry. Although the Co-op directors didn't admit that in the beginning it became evident in the course of the next year or so.

There were cases of fishermen who bought into the Central Coast Native Fishermen's Co-op on the strength of some very distant, largely fictitious, Indian ancestry. Mainly because they thought it would allow them to continue fishing and delivering fish if there was a strike in the industry. One of them grew up with me in Ladner; there's no Indian ancestry in his background whatsoever. He joined so he could keep on fishing in the event of a strike.

The executive of the Co-op held that since "they were all Native people" and all members of the cooperative they no longer needed a union around. The first response we got from the Indian fishermen and shoreworkers there was that under no circumstances were they going to drop their union membership. They realized what could happen if they did. However as time went on - and not very much time either, it was a matter of months - we found that singly and in groups our members at Bella Bella were leaving the union. When the Co-op plant actually got into operation its directors took the position that they would not recognize the union in any way, shape or form. Some of our members at Bella Bella told us that they understood that if they didn't drop their union membership they could forget about ever being hired in the Co-op plant.

We took the case before the Labour Relations Board and raised the question of unfair labor practices. But in the course of those hearing we were unable to get any witnesses from amongst the community to testify. People just wouldn't say before the Labour Relations Board what they had told us privately.

I recall talking to one Bella Bella fishermen who I won't name because his livelihood may still depend upon working in the community. He knew better than we did what had transpired but he was being brought forward by the Co-op directors as a witness for them at the Labour Relations Board hearings. I managed to get a few words with him alone before he was to testify and I just asked him "Why?" Because he had been behind the union all the way previously. His answer was that he had to live. He figured that he wouldn't be able to continue working and living in the community if he didn't go along with the others.

When I heard it from him I knew that the pressure applied must has been something: the economic and social pressure that had been applied in an area where there are virtually no other jobs. About a year later the Co-op directors took that matter to a vote and had us decertified from representing the fishermen and plant workers at Bella Bella.

But a few years later a similar thing happened to the Central Coast Native Fishermen's Co-op as had happened to the Co-op at Port Simpson. Marubeni pulled out its financing and the Co-op folded. Bella Bella was left with an empty plant.

The Davis Plan
In order to understand what happened in the fisheries during the seventies, you've got to go back some years. During periods of economic down turn there were always more people who came into fishing. It was a place where, if you could scrape together the price of a boat, you could try to make a living. For decades the price of a commercial fishing licence was a dollar a year and away you went. As early as 1946 there were union resolutions to establish some kind of limitation on the numbers of fishermen in the industry. The goal was to reserve the commercial fishery for bone fide, full time fishermen.

Although the cannery amalgamations of the fifties and early sixties had reduced the major processors to two or three big companies the one area which they didn't have control over was the supply of fish. If they weren't successful in persuading established fishermen to leave one company to come over to them they tried to swallow the other company. But their main thrust in getting more fish was to finance and build additional boats and bring more fishermen into the industry.

By the late 1950s there was an absolute drop in the average earnings of fishermen. The gains which were being made in fish prices were being lost in declining catches split up among more boats. With the advent of bigger and faster boats able to fish the coast more effectively and with the new power gear and electronics, it meant that the fishing fleet was tied up five days in the week even during the larger fish runs. There's only so much fish which can be caught, the balance has to be left to reproduce.

Where the halibut season had once ranged over four months, by the late fifties the season for the entire year was limited to twenty or thirty days. Where there had been a fleet of about forty seiners in the herring reduction fishery there were now about a hundred much more effective boats fishing herring. The UFAWU attempted to alleviate the situation as best it could by trying to establish certain limitations in contracts with the companies. We had some success in attempting to curb this rush by the companies to add more boats to their herring and seine fleets

Salmon was a different story altogether. We found no way to bring enough pressure to bear to get any form of limitation on the number of boats fishing salmon.

In 1956 the union put forward a comprehensive brief as to how a licence limitation system might work. We proposed that there be a five year moratorium on the issuance of new fishing licences. We proposed that the criterion for holding a commercial fishing licence would be that at least fifty percent of the person's earnings had come from fishing. That percentage would rise so that by the end of the five year moratorium those continuing to hold licences would have to show that at least seventy-five percent of their earnings came from fishing. People who were in fishing on a part time basis would have to make the choice between becoming full time fishermen or going into whatever other occupations they had.

We went into considerable detail on the issuances of licences to new people who wanted to enter the industry. That a waiting list should be established for those who wanted to enter fishing. Since limited entry would be established first in the salmon...
fishery, we felt that fishermen in other sectors of the industry should get preference in obtaining any new salmon fishing licences.

There were other proposals which dealt with cases where whole communities were dependant mainly on fishing. There would be a certain priority given their claims. Also that there be some consideration given to families of fishermen so that their children would be able to enter the industry. Finally, we held that special consideration should be given to Indian fishing licences. A lot of Indian fishing licences had been lost in the previous period and we proposed that a more equitable percentage of Indian participation in the industry be established.

What we were aiming for was that the individual fisherman would hold the fishing licence as long as he continued to use it to earn his living. When he retired or dropped out of fishing someone on the waiting list would get that licence. The licence would belong to the individual but it couldn't be bought and sold, there would be no market in them.

The Minister of Fisheries, Jimmy Sinclair, opposed the union on a whole host of other issues but was finally convinced that something had to be done. We had overcome one of the major arguments against licence limitation in the fisheries, which was the view that under English common law everybody has the right to use the resources of the sea. We argued that common fish resources had to do with subsistence for personal use not with the modern commercial fishery.

Shortly after, Sol Sinclair a professor at the University of Manitoba, was appointed as a one man investigating commission to survey the views of the various sectors of the industry and to suggest a system of limited licensing. He had an open mind and he knew everything there was to know about setting up market quotas in farming, which was his speciality, but he didn't have a practical understanding of how it might apply in fishing. He turned out a report four or five hundred pages long with a set of recommendations. But the report left open the whole question of how the fishing licences would be issued and transferred.

In any case, by the time the Sinclair Commission's report was brought in the Liberal government had been defeated and the Diefenbaker government was in power. During the Diefenbaker years there was virtually no movement on anything in fisheries. We had a hell of time to even get an appointment to see Angus McLean, the Minister of Fisheries. With the next Liberal government we got Robichaud as Minister of Fisheries and he was almost as evasive as McLean. For about ten years the Fisheries Ministry was stuck in limbo. It was uncertain whether anything would be done about limiting fishing licenses or not. All that government spokesmen did was to repeat a phrase which had come out of one of the reports,"There is too much capital and too many fishermen chasing too few fish." Which somehow had to be corrected. But nothing beyond that.

Jack Davis was appointed as Minister of Fisheries in the Trudeau government elected in 1968. I was still in jail when we heard that Davis had announced his plans to implement some kind of new licensing scheme for the fisheries. From what Steve Stavenes and I could make out it was going to be the kind of scheme which applies in the taxi business, where a limited number of licences are issued by a regulatory agency and can then be
bought by and sold to the highest bidder. Buck Suzuki sent us a lengthy letter in which he analyzed Davis' proposed plan much the same as we had. So by the time we got out of jail there was already a campaign being started against the Davis plan.

The fundamental thing wrong with Davis plan was that the licences would be attached to the boats. There was going to be a limit on the number of boats in the industry and the ownership of the boat would entail the ownership of the licence. But there were no restrictions on the pyramiding of licences, which meant that if you had the money you could buy three smaller boats and their licences and roll them into a bigger boat you had built. There was nothing to stop gillnet and troll licences from being converted into seine fishing.

There was absolutely no restriction on the sale of commercial fishing licences in Davis' plan. There would be an open market in licences and they could be sold to any person or corporation with the money to buy them. All they had to do was acquire ownership of a licensed fish boat. We could foresee the things which since have come about in the industry.

Davis announced his proposals in the late summer of '68 and went ahead with them in '69. Over the next two or three years he operated on the basis of press releases and made up the rules and interpretations of the plan as he went along, sometimes in consultation with his people in the Department of Fisheries and sometimes on his own. He made changes and added new provisos, none of which stemmed from any legislation but which had the effect of law. He used a section of the Fisheries Act which said that, "The minister has the right to issue and deny licences in the interests of the fisheries as he sees fit." That gave him the power to do just about anything.

There were virtually no rules clearly laid out. I studied it as best I could, as did others knowledgeable about this kind of administrative legality, and found it very difficult to determine how this program was supposed to apply in practice.

One of the first steps of Davis' plan was to divide the gillnet fleet: those boats which had averaged a catch to 10,000 pounds or more in the previous year would get an A licence and could continue to fish, but those who had caught less than that would be given a B licence, which ran out in ten years. Then they would either have to leave fishing or buy an A licence. The cannery fleets could pyramid their catch averages and wound up getting A licences for most of their boats.

We turned out some mass protests of fishermen who could see the handwriting on the wall. But Davis had the audacity to come to our annual convention and say that it didn't matter a damn to him whether we were against his plan in part or as a whole. He was going to put it into effect because he knew better than us. He told the press that the only people who were upset by his plan were the crew members of seineboats, that the union wasn't speaking for the smallboat owners. Yet there were more than a thousand fishermen who owned small boats, gillnet fishermen mainly, who were members of the UFAWU.

One cunning thing Davis did was to suggest to fishermen that he was creating an exclusive group of owners of fish boats through his licensing scheme. That they could consider their boat licences as a kind of investment which would increase in value over
time. That when they retired they would not only be selling their boats but also selling their licences. And that did capture the minds of a substantial percentage of fishermen who had worried if they would get the value of their boats and then got more for their newly acquired licences then they’d ever dreamed of.

Davis instituted a buy-back system: his ministry would buy back salmon licences from anyone who wanted to sell their licence and boat. That boat would then be retired from the salmon fishing fleet. One of the major beneficiaries of the buy-back scheme were the fish companies who had large fleets of boats, including old wrecks which were hardly used but which had gotten licences. They later sold them off at top prices for their licence value.

Despite the supposed fleet reduction program new fishing licences were still being issued. For example, when Davis was pressured by the owners of halibut vessels he opened the door for them to get licences to fish salmon as well. There turned out to be various backdoor ways in which new licences were issued.

There was no check by the Ministry of Fisheries to trace how the fishing licences were changing hands and where they were winding up. Just before I retired from the union presidency I decided to do a follow-up of what had happened to the licences. Fisheries claimed that they weren’t keeping track of how the licences were moving so I began to go through the records for the nine years that the Davis plan had been in effect by then. But it’s an overwhelming job, dealing with the thousands of licences and trying to determine who actually held them and how they changed hands. I got strong indications rather than hard and fast figures.

With the increase in huge, modern seiners the effective fishing units actually multiplied during the course of the Davis plan. The number of seiners more than doubled but their effective catch capacities probably increased five fold. So instead of providing for a longer fishing week in which the boats already in the industry could be better utilized, just the opposite happened. The number of fishing days during the season have gotten fewer. There are times now when the fleet is allowed to fish for only one day a week. The Davis plan exacerbated the very problems it set out to remedy.

For the first few years quite a few fishermen thought that they would gain from being able to sell or lease out the licences they had been given. But when the smoke began to clear the consequences became increasingly clear. Over the past dozen years or so it’s become more and more of a disaster for most fishermen.

For instance, when the herring fishery was first put into limited entry licensing the understanding was that if the fisherman who held the licence decided to leave the fishery that licence was to be cancelled. But some years later Fisheries decided that herring licences could be sold or leased and a free market for licences developed overnight. It was just a matter of how much people were prepared to pay for a licence. A sort of rentiers group developed amongst some fishermen who had gotten herring licences, and since then the number of herring licences rented out has increased, leaving many working fishermen in the position of sharecroppers.
A growing number of salmon licences are also now held by non-fishermen, people who own boats and licences and rent them out. There are recent government proposals for introducing the same type of area restrictions in the salmon fishery as they have in herring. With increasing area restrictions and the increasing number of licences needed to fish, fishermen will start to cannibalize each other - they'll try to buy up each other's licences. It may end up with the fish companies re-acquiring groups of salmon licences. While the major fish companies have divested themselves of the ownership of rental boats, whose fishermen they used to control directly, they may now accomplish the same thing indirectly.

After the Davis Plan was introduced, A licences on gillnetters and trollers sold for about four to five hundred dollars per boat ton and then went up to a thousand dollars per ton. Later the footage of the boat came to be used in marketing salmon licences. The cost of a salmon licence by that measure has been as high as two thousand dollars per foot of a boat. The price of salmon licences has fluctuated, and today they cost about a half of what they did at the frenzied peak. But it still means that someone who wants to go into fishing has to come up with twenty or thirty thousand dollars or more, on an average thirty-foot gillnetter, for the right to fish salmon.

All of these things flow from the thrust of both the Davis Plan and the Pearse Commission which followed - an approach that fosters privatizing fish resources and all aspects of the fishing industry. That approach is set against the union's position, which holds that those who do the fishing should be the ones who hold the licences, that there should be no system in which a rentier's group can rent out or sell the rights to catch fish. And that there should be no possibility of companies owning blocks of fishing licences as they once did earlier in the century.

While the value of licences provided benefits to a few people who are retiring from the industry, it has added an additional cost for those continuing to fish. It makes it almost impossible for the younger generation to get into the fishery. There are now people who aren't a part of the industry who become owners and renters of seine licences. It's become a real banker's game.

The Law of the Sea

Preparations for holding an International Law of the Sea Conference started at the beginning of the 1970s. The conference was supposed to sort out claims to seabed and marine resources among the countries of the world. As distinct from what happens in most such conferences, the effects of the Law of the Sea Conference became more far-reaching than anyone expected. As a result of those conferences the territorial limit was extended to twelve miles and, more importantly, the economic control zone reaching two hundred miles off shore was established. It then became possible for Canada to control how some of its fish stocks would be used and conserved.

The UFAWU wasn't part of the early discussions, but in about 1972 we were asked by the federal government to participate in preparatory discussions with them. They said that
they wanted to ascertain what concerns were uppermost in the minds of fishermen about the changes which might take place.

The primary consideration for us in the B.C. fishing industry was the growth of a high seas fishery off our shores. Quantities of salmon from Alaska and British Columbia were being caught by the Japanese high seas fleets even though they were fishing west of the 175th meridian. It was beginning to have a major impact on some of the Alaskan fisheries. There was the threat of other countries coming into the high seas fishery too. South Korea was talking about entering that fishery; so were Taiwan and China. Even the Peruvians were talking about moving a part of their huge fishing fleet up here to operate off the west coast. We wanted the conference to adopt the principle that the country where the salmon spawned would have control over how they were fished on the high seas.

We were also concerned by the possibilities of European nations coming to fish on our continental shelf for ground fish and decimating the stocks. The decline of halibut stocks was already beginning to show up in the Bering Sea and south of the Aleutian Islands, not primarily due to over-fishing by local fleets. The modern draggers were quite beyond anything we had ever reckoned with - they and the 300 foot factory ships which were part of the high seas fishing fleets. There is a procedure of 'midwater trawl' but the basic method is to drag right along the bottom and that takes just about anything that's there. In the process of taking huge qualities of sole and flounder the off shore trawlers scooped up large amounts of halibut.

We went into the meetings with the federal government and outlined what we'd like to see coming out of the conference. Their representatives assured us that fisheries was going to be the top item on the agenda. In order to mollify fishermen they eventually invited the UFAWU to send a representative as one of the Canadian delegates to the Law of the Sea Conference. The first meeting was to be held in Caracas during the summer of 1974 and almost all of the nations of the world were represented.

In 1971 I’d moved from being secretary-treasurer of the union to being president. That gave me the chance to get away from some of the day-to-day affairs and spend more time on the broader issues affecting fishermen. So I was selected to be the union's representative and an advisor to the Canadian delegation. As it turned out, I was one of the few fishermen at the Law of the Sea Conference.

Most of the discussion in the first conference meetings centered around military and shipping matters. The right of 'innocent passage' for freighters and the question of the passage of warships through what some states considered their territorial waters.

Fisheries resources seemed to be of secondary priority throughout the conference. The issues of primary concern to the major states were the mineral and oil resources in the seabed, basically those of the continental shelves. The other major issues had to do with the right of unrestricted passage of shipping - both commercial and military. The major shipping nations of the world had an agenda of virtually unrestricted sea passage anywhere. These issues had come to a head, after a long history of disputes, because a number of coastal states were beginning to take unilateral action in defining their territorial waters and exclusive use zones. Some countries in South America had already
extended their territorial waters to two hundred miles. In the matter of fishing rights, the most famous case at the time was the 'Cod war' dispute between Iceland and Britain. A number of the major maritime states wanted to get the question of territorial and historic rights to sea resources formalized.

When it was time to talk about fish, salmon was not very high on the agenda at all. Fisheries like sardines and mature herring or anchovy and cod run into the tens of millions of metric tons per year. I think the total world fishery in those years was something like seventy odd million metric tons annually. Of that, salmon harvested world wide was a couple of hundred thousand metric tons; and the B.C. salmon fishery was just a proportion of that. Salmon is not a very big part of the world food supply. Both in volume and in earnings the salmon fishery is only a small proportion of world fisheries. But it is the primary fishery as far as B.C. fishermen are concerned. It constitutes seventy five percent of our income. So we wanted some of these clauses about sharing fish resources nailed down.

The question of what should be done to protect our salmon stocks for our own fishermen began to get watered down more and more. It got to the point where the nation rearing the salmon would have to take into account the "historic rights" of offshore fishing fleets. By "historic" was meant anything that already existed, including the high seas fisheries which had only been developed in the previous decade. The Canadian government delegates gradually came to accept that proposition.

Most representatives at the Law of the Sea conference weren't even familiar with the terminology applying to salmon. They used the term "anadromous fish" and got into arguments like whether eels were anadromous or not. In fact, there were hardly any fishermen at the Law of the Sea Conference. There was Kevin Condon, from the newly formed Newfoundland Fishermen and Allied Workers and there was an American fisherman who represented a group in California. But almost every other country was represented by lawyers and diplomats and military people and such.

In terms of the fisheries on the continental shelf, the proposed establishment of a two hundred mile economic control zone sounded good. But it included provisos. A country like Canada had to show that it was harvesting all the fish which could be taken from the offshore zones on a sustained basis. If that couldn't be shown, then the 'underutilized' fish resources had to be shared with those other states who wanted to harvest it. Basically it established rights of other fishing nations to off shore resources even within the two hundred mile economic zones. And that would mainly effect countries like Canada.

For instance, if there was a potential hake fishery off our coast, then unless we were utilizing that fishery to its fullest we would have to allow other countries to harvest it. And in fact, a large Polish trawl fleet appeared off our shores shortly after the conference. There was an even more extensive incursion on the Grand Banks off the east coast. The question arose whether we would have to allocate a portion of those fish to other countries in perpetuity through the 'historic rights' they would establish or whether there was some way in which they could be phased out.
The worst of my fears came true. There were lots of debates over the oil resources and seabed utilization and discussions on many important points alright, but little on the fisheries in so far as how changes would effect us on the west coast. It gradually became evident that those of us in the Canadian delegation who weren't government officials weren't going to be consulted in our particular areas of expertise. We were essentially showpieces, there to demonstrate that the Canadian government consulted its fishermen.

The chief Canadian negotiator was a guy called Beesly. He would call a session of the Canadian delegates almost every morning and give a forty minute talk about what had emerged in his previous day's discussions. He'd allow somebody from the Department of Fisheries another five or ten minutes and then there would be about five minutes left for the 'advisors' to ask our questions and make our suggestions. There was a continual contest during the three weeks that conference lasted - Beesly trying to lecture us about what he'd been doing and some of us trying to get him to listen and consider and raise the points that we were concerned about.

After Caracas, the next stage of the conference was held at Geneva in 1975. I was there four weeks and again the same pattern emerged, but even harder to break through. Because the government representatives more than ever didn't want us raising points which would require changes in the positions they'd already taken. They tried to sell us the idea that all our concerns were being taken care of. But we had hardly had the opportunity to express what those concerns were. Finally I blew my cork. Some members of the Canadian government delegation got me into a room and tried to convince me that what was 'really' happening in the conference was different than it appeared. That through 'quiet diplomacy' they were going to get the agreements Canadian fishermen had asked for.

I also went to the two final conferences in New York in late 1975 and 1976. By that time the proposal of a two hundred mile economic zone was being fixed in place. But the conference left open how those zones would be defined by contiguous countries, such as some parts of the coasts of American and Canada. It was decided that each country would have to negotiate those boundaries with their neighbours and if an agreement couldn't be reached between them they would accept the arbitration of the International Court at the Hague.

The Japanese originally opposed any fishing restrictions on the high seas and were very opposed to the proposed two hundred mile economic zones. But they came under increasing pressure from other major maritime nations at the conference. Most of the nations of the world signed that treaty. Canada signed it, Japan finally did, the Soviet Union - almost all the important European fishing nations signed. Britain was also very much opposed to the two hundred mile economic zone at the start, basically because of what had happened during the 'codfish war' in the previous decade, when they were unsuccessful in retaining what they considered their traditional cod fisheries off the coast of Iceland. But Britain was worried that other countries might come in and tap their North Sea oil, which was then just coming on stream, if they didn't nail it down by agreeing to this two hundred mile economic zone. So they too signed the agreements,
I think Britain and some of the other major maritime nations felt that if they didn't sign an international agreement, there would be a proliferation of coastal states extending their territorial water unilaterally.

Finally, when the Law of the Sea agreements had been drafted and what seemed to be an overall agreement reached, the United States pulled the plug and refused to endorse it. They imposed their own two hundred mile limit and accepted some sections of the draft agreement which they felt were to their advantage. But they didn't sign the international agreements drafted by the conferences. They still take the position that Hecate Strait and Dixon Entrance are international waters as far as the United States is concerned. And they claim the rights of passage for their commercial and military vessels in various waters of the world, rights which would have been limited, to some extent, if they had signed the international treaty.

The high seas beyond the two hundred mile economic zones remain wide open for anybody to exploit, although there is a general principle that countries fishing on the high seas have to come to some international agreements on how they operate. For instance in the case of tuna, which are pursued everywhere and can be caught both inside and outside the two hundred mile zones. There are now some international agreements on the total harvest and national quotas of tuna taken on the high seas.

Some species are vulnerable to new techniques in high seas fishing and others less so. Some fish, like salmon and tuna, are not dependant upon the depth of water for feeding as much as others, and do travel far beyond the continental shelf. But most ground fish, such as flounder and sole and the other flat fishes, tend to be concentrated in the waters of the continental shelf. There are places where the two hundred mile limit doesn't reach out to the end of the continental shelf and doesn't include all the places where such fish are concentrated. The high seas fisheries can still create a real problem of decimating fish stocks unless there are negotiated international agreements.

For years we've advocated that all the nations around the North Pacific should be drawn into a regional treaty on fishing and marine resources. I don't know how long it's going to take to establish that. But it becomes increasingly necessary as new technological developments make high seas fishing more feasible and the pressures increase for the fishing fleets to go out and harvest the oceans. It's now possible to fish commercially where we once never thought possible.

One of the major gaps in the Law of the Sea Conference was that there should have been more consideration given to the explosion of new technology and the build up of fishing fleets around the world. There should have been a much fuller discussion of the overall amounts of fish available and the overall quotas which could be set. Some control over the catch capacity of the boats in the fishing fleets coming on stream. The only thing we got was the occasional pep talk from somebody in the Food and Agricultural Organization telling us about the necessity of producing more food in the world.

The recent history of most major fisheries in the world shows a tremendous rise in the amount of fish caught, followed by a leveling off and then with a tendency to decline. I raised the question of the recurrent pattern of decline of fish stocks through overfishing...
but it just never got adequate treatment. The question of where we are going and whether we are tending to exhaust the supplies of fish regionally and worldwide was never effectively dealt with.

The related question is what is happening to the marine environments in which the fish stocks are reared. Fish are a renewable resource, as is often repeated, but only if the environments which they need to spawn and feed and survive in are maintained in good condition. In the Mediterranean, for instance, pollution is a very big problem. After the Conference meetings in Geneva I went to Yugoslavia for a week. At Rieka there was a river running into the Adriatic which was green with chlorine and industrial wastes. The fishermen there told me that the size of the fish they were catching were getting smaller and smaller because of the overharvesting.

"But you've also got some pretty bad pollution, from what I can see of the river here," I said.

They came back with "It's not mainly our fault. The Italians are the ones really polluting the Adriatic."

So you also have that, the governments of different countries pointing the finger at each other as the major culprits and getting off the hook that way on doing something about marine and environmental pollution.

On balance, the two hundred mile economic zone has been a benefit to us. The Canadian government is now in a position to control the amount of fishing by foreign draggers or any other fleets off our coast. But there is still that stipulation that if we are not fishing any particular species to their maximum sustainable harvest we've got to share them with other countries who want to take them. But under the International Law of the Sea treaty our fish stocks are protected a bit better than they were before.
18.

RETURN TO FISHING

When I first started to work for the union my intention was to give a few years to it. I never had the intention of making it a life long career and hoped to return to fishing eventually. You do come to realize that there are contributions you can make in the union office but I always had a hankering to return to work with my hands.

We were always working under tremendous pressure and were always short staffed in the union. We felt that every one of us should have been born triplets to handle the work, to have the ability to be at three different places at the same time. I didn't want to get into the condition I'd seen some other union leaders reach - where they are burned out before their time or nervous wrecks or alcoholics. In later years I began to wonder ' How much more of this can I take?''

As the years rolled on I found that it became more and more difficult for me to retain a reasonable equilibrium under pressure. I was becoming crankier and crankier. I knew that it was effecting my relationships with people in the union staff and on the Executive Board. My temper ran away with me at times.

During the last year or two that I worked for the union I spent a lot of time talking to Grace about it. I could see that she favoured the idea of me going back to fishing or at least doing something different because the pressure I felt at work came home to her. Grace and I took a holiday in the Yukon in the fall of '76 and discussed what we'd do for the balance of our lives. We decided that come the following convention I would turn in my resignation. So, after discussing that with people in the union I told them that they should look around for someone else to nominate for president.

The union then didn't have a pension plan for it's officers or staff. There was only severance pay. I had worked for the union for thirty-one years so I had about a year and a half severance pay coming to me. That was it.

One of the things which sometimes burns me up are people who think that during the time I worked for the union I must have amassed a lot of money. That I must have gotten a top salary. I had that thrown at me just recently. A fisherman here said to me, "You don't need to fish anyway." They don't understand that the pay I got during the years I worked for the union was a great deal less than what they earned fishing. Grace worked most the years I was an officer of the union. We didn't lead a poverty stricken existence; we raised our kids and put clothes on their backs. I'm not complaining. But it gripes me that people who should know better assume that I've got a big nest egg tucked away. I was fifty three years of age and had to find a way to make a living after I retired as the union president.

It wasn't a simple or easy thing at all to get back into fishing. By then the Davis Plan had driven the prices of boat licences sky high. I made a few discrete enquiries about the possibilities of getting out on a boat. I put my name down at the union hall for a job but got no offers at all. When I was Secretary-Treasurer of the union I had any number of
offers from skippers to go out with them. But a lot of that talk was just talk. When the time came that I really needed a job there was nothing going. Many of the larger boats are skippered by the owners and there'd be conflicts about share agreements aboard which they wouldn't especially want the former union president involved in directly. There were union skippers running company boats but in most cases they had regular crews. I didn't expect them to drop somebody to take me on.

Finally, Andy Karjala approached me at my own retirement banquet. "I hear you're looking for a job to go out on herring. Are you serious?" he asked.

"Yeah I'm serious. I've got to work."

Andy said, "If you want to go out as a deck hand okay. But I've already hired your son as mate."

"That's okay. I can take orders from anybody." So he listed me on the crew. It was an old sardine seiner which was being used as a packer.

When the owners of the boat found out that Andy had hired me they told him that he'd have to find somebody else. Andy got so mad that he wouldn't take the boat out. He took the season off and went for a trip to Finland. My son got away on another boat but I was still on the beach looking.

Just before the fleet sailed, Glen McEachern, who was the union Welfare Director, got hold of me and asked if I wanted to go out on another packer, the Linda.

"If Sven Jerstad is looking for a man I sure as hell would like to go," I said.

"Well, they're looking for a mate. Do you think you can handle it?"

"Oh sure". So I phoned Sven.

He was both the skipper and the owner of the boat and his son was the engineer. Sven at first thought I was kidding but I convinced him I was serious. What had happened was that his regular mate had gone on a bender. So getting out was sort of accidental. Anyway, it was a month's work and the wages were more than I would have made as the union president. So I felt good about that.

Sven asked me if I could still navigate. "Well, I can take her to just about anywhere on the coast where they fish herring - except for a few bays on the central coast. But the West Coast of the Island I know." He was going to be packing out of Barkley Sound.

But Sven didn't believe me. It didn't seem likely to most people that after having been at the head of the union for what seemed a lifetime, that I knew anything other than union work. Sven became more doubtful than ever because on the first day out I got seasick and was puking my guts out. Now I haven't been seasick more than four times in my life, but that trip I was.

In the morning as we were heading into Barkley Sound Sven said, "It was a pretty long night." It had been my watch but he'd stayed in the wheelhouse because he didn't believe I knew how to go into the Sound. Any place we got into where there any narrow passages he'd take over the wheel and didn't rely on me as the mate. That griped me because he was treating me as if I'd never been at sea before. I kept most of it to myself.

On the third trip, coming back to Vancouver and on the way across from Active Pass, he hit a log and bent both propellers. So we had to go into the shipyard. But we made
another trip up to the Queen Charlottes to pack herring before the end of the season. It was March of '77 and when we tied up and I began to think seriously about what I was going to do in the future. By this time Sven had located his regular mate and I wouldn't be going back on the packer.

I mulled over going gillnetting again. The first question was where I could rent a boat because I certainly couldn't afford to buy one. In the back of my mind I wasn't sure if I'd still be able to make a living gillnetting, with all the changes that had taken place since I'd last fished.

I contacted Brian Fraser, who was a manager for Cassiar Packing Company, and told him I was looking for a gillnet boat to rent. He told me to meet him a few days later down at Celtic Shipyards, off Marine Drive, where Cassiar kept some of their boats.

When I got there I ran into a tenderman by the name of Eddie Tanino. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"Well, I'm looking for a boat to go fishing with."

"I heard you were retired," said Eddie.

"No. I've got to earn a living."

"Do you know anything about the boats they've got down here?" he asks me.

"I'm supposed to meet Brian Fraser."

"Oh..I'll tell you what. I'll take you around now and show you a few of the boats they've got here." And he took me around and suggested that I have a good look at one called the Cassiar 64, which was up on the beach. He knew the guy who had been running it and thought it had been well looked after.

It seemed like a pretty good boat and eventually I made the arrangement to rent it. The rental was something like three and a half or four thousand dollars a season. But the company only paid you the minimum contract prices for salmon. So in addition to the rental you were giving up roughly twenty percent of the value of the fish. "Well, okay" I said to myself, "If that's what I have to do to get back into fishing".

Then I had to round up the capital to get started. The company just rented the boat so I had to buy my own nets. That was four thousand dollars for three nets, which was the absolute minimum I could get by with. Even that required getting an advance from Cassiar Packing on my future earnings. It may not seem like much but I was worried about getting deeply into debt at my age, not knowing how I'd make out.

I went to see Goro Suzuki, who I knew pretty well and who was in the net business, and we discussed the kinds of colours and what not. These nylon nets were new to me from the standpoint of practical details. It took a while to find the combination of nets which would work best in the particular inside and outside waters I intended to fish.

The next question was whether I was going to fish on my own or not. I didn't really want to go out by myself. It wasn't that I couldn't do it, it was just that I'd rather have a deckhand along. I didn't want to be anchored in a bay somewhere and sit looking at the walls of the cabin. While I'm talking about this my daughter, Barbara, said "How about taking me along as a deck hand?" So I took her with me the first couple of years.
Barbara had left school some years before and had had various jobs. She'd worked in fish plants and had worked on boats a bit - as a deckhand trolling the first year and then on a seiner for part of a season. She had taken a class in navigation and a net mending course and had also studied engine mechanics at the vocational school in Terrace for ten months. She then had visions of becoming a seineboat skipper.

Our first fishery was in Barkley Sound. At the last minute Barbara said she couldn't come for the first week because of a conference she had to attend. So she sent her girlfriend to work as my deckhand for the first week.

It was too early for the run to show up in Barkley Sound and everybody told me it was crazy to go out there then. You'd be lucky to make enough to pay for your fuel. But I wanted to see if I could still judge what two hundred fathoms was like. Whether I could set off the beach or to the beach. I wanted to get my hand in again.

The first thing was to find where somebody was getting the odd fish. I saw a boat lying over against the islands which divide Trevor from Imperial Eagle channel. I went in behind him a ways and found a spot and fired the net out, towed it out and got the proper curves in. It was a beautiful day with a bit of a westerly blowing and I lay there for about an hour and half and didn't get a single fish. A complete skunk. I fished the balance of the opening off San Mateo Bay with a little better success.

I guess the best part of it all were the sets just before and after daybreak. Hearing everything come alive, with sea birds squawking and feeding. Just that time when it's so quiet and then all of a sudden things start to spring to life. Maybe the sun is coming up or maybe it's drizzling rain - but it's beautiful.

As far as the fishing itself was concerned, I tangled with the rocks a couple of times and ripped up my net a bit by making misjudgments on how the tide would take it. I remember sitting on the outer end of my net once when a seiner came along. The skipper said, "It's none of my business Homer but I think the other end of your net is on the beach." The tide had just started to turn and I had just enough time to haul it in without ripping the net all to hell. There were a few other incidents like that but I was able to pick things up again fairly quickly.

It was quite an experience for me, quite a feeling. I think we got a total of fifty fish during the entire first week and about a hundred and fifty the second week. By that time Barbara was on board.

During the first three weeks in Barkley Sound when there weren't many fish, at times I wondered whether I'd be able to earn a living at it. That was the only time I had those doubts. When we got into the period when the run was there I found that my fish deliveries were either average or a bit better than average. One of the high points was when I had three hundred and thirty odd sockeye aboard and the packer came alongside and said, "Jesus, I can't understand it. Nobody in the inlet has got three hundred fish." I felt really good about that. It told me that I was getting back in the swing of it and that it was just a matter of putting in the effort and time. In fact it turned out to be the best season I've ever had in Barkley Sound since I returned to fishing.
The only qualms I had was how I'd make out in areas I'd never fished before. Some of the upcoast places I'd been to when I was on the dragger but I'd never gillnetted in them. Although I was fairly confident that I'd be able to catch on to it.

We got to Rivers Inlet just when the fishing was opening. That evening, as I fired my net out for the first time, all of a sudden the drum drive wouldn't turn. What had happened was that a set screw holding the jack shaft had come loose and fallen down between the bunk and the bulkhead, in place where I couldn't reach. So I had to pick the net up by hand, cursing all the time and telling Barbara to take the crow bar if she had to and rip the bunk apart and find that screw. But she managed to get it out and by the time I had the net aboard she had the drum drive fixed. She's pretty handy that way.

My brother George was then fishing in Rivers Inlet and he tried to steer me to some good spots. He called me on the radio. "They're starting to hit here so just fire the net out wherever you find a space." I picked up close to two hundred sockeye on that first set because I'd gotten to Rivers inlet just at the peak of the run.

I'd look around for people I knew were good fishermen and try to find out something from them. I'd watch where they were fishing and how they were making their sets. But you don't like to do that too much. In Smith's Inlet I ran across a fisherman I knew making a set off a kelp bed. It looked promising so I thought I'd try it after him.

"Do you know how to make this set?" he asked over the radio.
"I haven't got a clue Archie but there's only one way I'm going to find out."

"All right you stubborn old bugger. I'll show you how" And he gave me directions on exactly how to set in close to the kelp and out again.

Just as I came around another guy roared in and corked me. By the time the tide was slack this guy's cork line was not thirty or forty feet from mine. But as it turned out there weren't any fish coming that way on that tide. I got back to Archie on the radio and said, "I've got a good set coming to me. Sometime, some place, Harry will have set out where the fish are hitting and I'll get my own back. If I'm corked I remember it."

I had one other fellow cork me quite deliberately that first year. But I corked him back soon after. Some fishermen, even members of the union, figured that I might be a softy because I'd worked in the office so long. That I wouldn't be able to hold my end up. But I made it clear that I wasn't going to be walked on.

In making the arrangement to rent the boat I had agreed to fish the Skeena part of the season. The company's only plant was the Cassiar cannery on the Skeena. I wasn't all that eager to fish there because I didn't know much about gillnetting in that area. But after fishing Rivers and Smiths inlets for ten or twelve days I ran on up to the Skeena.

There were a lot of fish already up the river; everybody was reporting fish jumping and the Indian food fishery had picked up some big sets. So Brian Fraser got all excited. "Go up to the end of Dehorsey island and find a set there," he tells me.

"Look. I don't know anything about fishing upriver and I'm not going to take my brand new sockeye net and and lose the God damn thing." Because the Skeena is full of snags. Even the old timers lose their nets there. I knew guys fishing the Skeena who had one net on the drum, another one spread out on a net rack ready to go and a third one in a bundle
all to use on a particular opening if they had to. They can go out and snag one net up, get another one aboard and continue fishing. But I had just one net which was fishable in that area.

"Well, I can loan you a net. It won't cost you anything," Brian said. He was anxious to get a slice of the fish for Cassiar. So I went down to their net storage shed and they hauled out this decrepit old net. I counted nineteen breaks in the lead line and about twelve in the cork line where it had been snagged up. But I thought, "What the hell. I'll go and try it."

I got up on the grounds well ahead of the opening and came across a fishermen by the name of Hideo Fujimoto. "How do I set here?" I asked him. In that part of the Skeena the tide floods in at three or four knots. That may not seem like much but it's quite a speed in a constricted and snagged up river like that.

"Whatever you do don't set across the channel. Because there'll be a half dozen people who'll cross over the top of your cork line with their nets before you're half way out. Set on an angle - you watch what I do."

About a half hour before the opening along came an Indian fisherman I knew by the name of Joe Daniels. He bumped up against my boat and said, "What the hell are you doing here?"

"I'm trying to figure out a place to set."

"Well for Christ sake don't get in my way," he growled. And I realized that Joe had been in the bar at least part of the afternoon. He went down below Hide and eventually we fired our nets out.

I could see fish hitting the net almost continuously. 'This is really something. This is going to be one hell of a good set,' I thought. But the tide was taking me up towards the boundary of where you were allowed to fish on the Skeena. I wasn't sure if I'd drift over the boundary or not.

"You better start hauling it in if you've got fish in your net because there's a patrol boat laying right at the boundary and he won't give you an inch" one of the nearby fishermen hollered. So I started to pick up the net.

Just as I reached the boundary the slack tide started, which meant I needn't have hauled in my net. I felt sort of foolish. So, like a damn fool, I ran back down river where instead of getting a hundred fish in a set I only got twenty. Here I had been in the hot spot of the river and didn't know how to fish it. When I got back to the cannery I decided to put my own net back on and go fish outside the mouth of the Skeena.

Barbara and I went off Digby Island, not far from Prince Rupert, to a drift which everybody referred to as 'the old man's drift'. "Well, it's the place for me. Better than some area where I'll get into difficulties," I figured.

It turned foggy and we fished there for four days and nights without any clear weather at all. But we ended the week with almost a thousand fish - which is a good haul. I should have stayed there but I kept thinking about the sockeye run which should be hitting the Fraser about then. It used to come in around my birthday, on the second of August. So
Barbara and I dropped off our fish at Prince Rupert and hightailed it down to the Fraser, running seventy two hours steady and arriving tired and beat.

We’d get one day of fishing and three days closure so that over the next two weeks I only picked up about five hundred fish. I later found out that guys we’d fished beside off the mouth of the Skeena had gotten two thousand fish in the week after we left.

I had a picture in my mind of fishing on the Fraser when I was young. But it’s an entirely different fishery today. There were plenty of boats then too but nothing like it is today. When they open the Fraser now there are an impossible number of boats and a lot of high powered skiffs charging around and people fishing other people's cork lines. Instead of fishing three or four nights a week you get a one night opening. If you’re lucky you might get a shot at the fish but it’s a horror show as far as the actual fishing is concerned. So I’ve gradually come to stay away from the Fraser and now fish more in the north country.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed getting back into fishing. I liked being able to work with my hands and not have to be responsible for hundreds of problems as a union officer. And I enjoyed being on the boat, I always did.

The most difficult thing to adjust to was the intensive competition which has developed between fishermen. There's no such thing anymore of not intercepting some portion of someone else fish. You've got to try to judge how you're going to make a living and yet not rob somebody else's net. The constant pressure of trying to do that is the only thing which detracts from fishing for me. The rest of it is really pleasurable. The first year after coming back to fish I even enjoyed mending nets and doing repairs. But now it's mainly just work.

Barbara was pretty good around a boat. She could navigate reasonably well and had learned how to use charts and that kind of thing. But a certain tension began to develop between the two of us. We got along well for the first month and half or so but as the season progressed she became more and more silent. I couldn't figure out what was wrong. It got to the point where Barbara would hardly talk to me.

Eventually, one day when I'd set the net into a whole mess of kelp and pop weed and everything else off Port Hardy, it came to a head. I'd spent three hours in the stern picking out weed and very few fish from the net and she never even looked out the cabin. I was cursing inwardly, and outwardly too. "What the hell is going on here?"

At the end of that week we went over to Sointula and Barbara said she was leaving. She also told me she'd contacted a friend of hers as her replacement. At that point we had a really good row. I'd been on the verge of it for quite a while. We'd had cabin fever for a couple of weeks.

"If I want a deckhand I'll hire who I want. There's no bloody way you're going to hire a deckhand for me." She wanted me to hire a friend of hers but I didn't want another woman deckhand. I blasted her about what had been developing in the last two or three weeks. So it became pretty heated.

I suppose it was inevitable, probably more so with Barbara than with anybody. She was the youngest and my pet. The only girl in the family. I suppose in some ways I was
treating her as if she were still about twelve when she was already twenty one--thinking back on it.

But the next season I hired her on again and she put in the full season. We also fished herring together. Barbara worked on several seine boats after that. She went out with her brother Bruce when he was running a seiner and then on two of the larger seine boats for B.C. Packers. She worked deck and cooked and mended nets and could do just about everything there was to do around the boat. On one trip she was the skiff man. She's pretty skookum, she's stronger than she looks.

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My wife went fishing with me after Barbara quit to go seining. Grace had worked in an office most of her adult life and while she'd been out with me for short trips she'd never actually been out fishing. I think she had a somewhat glamorized idea of what it would be like; to go out there and fish and get away from working in the office. So she resigned from her job with the Carpenters Union in the spring of 1979 and fished the next three seasons with me.

We fished together everywhere along the coast. It amazed me, but she never once got seasick and she never once complained about the rough weather. She did everything. She learned to haul gear when we were trolling and when we were gillnetting she'd do most of what a deckhand would.

Grace didn't seem to be bothered by the different sorts of hours you have to put up while gillnetting. We worked out a system where in the daytime, when the net was out, I'd get an hour's sleep while she watched the net. At night I'd let her sleep, except when I got too tired. Then she'd stand watch while I got a bit of rest.

Once I made this really good set at about three thirty at night. I got almost four hundred sockeye in that one set and was still picking them out of the net in the morning. By this time Grace was up and had made some breakfast. As I tied into that she went out to the stern and picked up the last few fish in the net. Just then the packer came alongside to take delivery of our fish. The mate yelled, "By God, that's the life. You stay in the cabin and have breakfast and your wife picks the fish." But she did all those things.

She seemed to enjoy it and learned very fast what to do. The only thing she got fed up with was the noise, because it was an aluminum boat and everything in the cabin would be rattling and banging away. She'd come on deck and say, "I'll handle the gear for a while and you go in and listen to that damn racket."

That season I also started trolling and we both had to learn that from the ground up. I'd been doing straight gillnetting but there were long waits between gillnet openings when we were sitting idle at some float or other. So I thought I'd rig the boat up as a combination gillnet-troller.

Our first attempt at trolling was around Dundas Island. It was a bearcat of a place to fish. For one thing, it was spring salmon fishing and virtually all of it was close to the rocks. People were only using twelve or fourteen fathoms of gear from the water line.
down to the bottom lead. You were running over reefs and rocks and what not. I lost almost as much gear as the value of the fish I caught. I'd lose whole lines of gear; cannon ball, flashers, lures and everything else. I guess that's fairly typical of anyone who ever started in trolling.

I was a bit embarrassed at first about going over to fishermen I didn't know, some whom were half my age, and looking over their gear and asking what they were using. Having been the UFAWU president had nothing to do with it, that meant nothing. But I had been a fisherman all my life. It was kind of ridiculous of me, thinking back on it.

I could hardly catch anything at first, although I figured I had a decent range of troll gear. Later I found that the trollers who fished Dundas Island used a specialized type of gear - they were using double flashers and what they called firecrackers and three pronged hooks they tied a certain way and so on. That was what you needed to get springs there at that time of the year.

Later in the season we came down into the Gulf of Georgia but I still hadn't figured out how to handle my troll gear. I'd be trolling alongside these experts and they'd be yarding them in right, left and center. I'm doing everything they are - trolling at the same speed and as far as I know I've got the same kind of gear and everything. I couldn't understand why I couldn't catch any fish to speak of.

When we got back home I went over to Tommy Hirose, who I'd bought the gear from. He was one of the older Japanese guys and had a gear store in Steveston. I took some of the gear I'd rigged up along and said, "There's something that's not right here".

He looked it over carefully, shook his head and said, "Yes. You've got everything hooked up wrong."

Then he sat me down at the work table in his shop, measured off the various lengths and showed me how to hook them up and made me do twenty five or thirty pieces while he watched. He did a few himself to make sure I had the idea. In the meantime, anybody who came into his shop, whether they knew me or not, he'd drag over to show them how he was teaching me to rig gear.

In trolling it's critical to know what particular gear works best in each location under different conditions. It may be a different style of lures or different depths and speeds you troll at. There always seems to be more to learn. I'm still learning. There are guys out there still beating the pants off me in the amount they pull in. But over the years I've gradually come to know something about what I'm doing. It's a combination of experience and observation.

You stay in the stern turning over the gear and cleaning accumulations of jellyfish and weed off your lines and gear. You try this and that combination and you begin to realize what piece of gear is then catching fish. If one kind of gear is catching more fish than the others you put that on all the lines, if that's what the fish happen to be biting on at the time.

The other thing I learned about is 'feed'. Grace got into watching for seabirds and feed and all that kind of thing faster than me. She got to be pretty good with the depth sounder, which can pick out feed in the water below the boat. In the case of salmon it's not
plankton they're feeding on but some bigger stuff. Mostly what I'd be looking for would be needle fish, small herring, small squid. If there are schools of herring around you'll often find coho and spring salmon feeding on them too.

Trollers in the past did it by watching for diving birds that are feeding and by watching seagulls that come in over the top of the ducks and and try to rob them of what they've got in their mouths. So trollers would watch for indications of feed and drop their gear where they thought it was, because it's not necessarily visible from the surface.

It's also a matter of watching the other boats to see how they're making out. But at other times you can hit a good run of fish just by playing a hunch. So you're never really sure.

Hauling up the fish can be challenging. The point is to get every fish you've hooked aboard, especially if you happen to have a nice big spring salmon on the line. But you're never sure whether you're going to land the fish you've hooked. It takes a while to acquire the skill to do it right. Once you've got the fish in the boat there is still a fair amount of work to be done. You alternate between hauling your gear and dressing the fish. If you've got a deckhand who is better at cleaning the fish than at hauling gear he may be doing that. But by the end of the day you're pretty exhausted. It seems you've barely gotten to sleep when the alarm rings to get up and get out for the next day. It takes a lot out of you, especially during the first couple of trips of the season when your body is getting accustomed again to the work and the hours.

Most of the season we'd be gillnetting. We ran into some problems while gillnetting near the entrance to the Skeena. When you're fishing Dundas and Zayas you've got a lot of room but at some of the other places, like at Greentops or Holland Rocks, you're working closer in. I lost a whole net there, and almost more, drifting into Greentops.

The tide looked like it was only moving at about a quarter of a knot so decided to grab a bit of sleep. I was just dozing off when Grace woke me up and I could see that we were drifting to beat hell and were heading right for Greentops rock. I started hauling net for all I was worth but caught Greentops with more than half my net out. One end went round the rocks on one side and the boat came down on the other.

Just then another net drifted down right on top of mine. It was from an older Japanese fisherman who hardly spoke English. His net drifted over the top of mine and I was trapped. He let go of his net and went to see if he could get the other end while I got on the radio phone to my son Nick, who was fishing not far off, to come over to give me a hand. In the meantime I'd gotten hold of a section of my own and the other guy's cork lines, which were tangled together, and lashed a line around both of them to hold my boat off the rocks. The two nets were hung up on a kelp bed off the shore.

My boat was trapped between the two nets and the rocks. If I had tried to go over them I might have wound up with the net wrapped around the propellor, unable to move and in even worse trouble. If the wind had come up much stronger we could have been in real danger, although I think that if the boat had gone aground we could have scrambled up on the rocks.

My idea was that the two other boats working together might be able to pull that net off, enough so that I could get my boat out of there. Nick tried to contact this other boat,
but it was an older Japanese Canadian fisherman who hardly spoke English. So I radioed another Japanese Canadian fishermen who I knew was fishing in that area and explained the situation and asked him to relay to this other guy what we wanted to do in Japanese. Instead of that he came over with his big boat, grabbed hold of the net, started towing on it and ended up by snapping it.

By then it was blowing hard. But I then got into my skiff and took the end of tow line with me and rowed it out to the edge of the kelp. Nick came in close and threw me his tow line but it didn't reach. Finally, after four or five hours, we got both nets clear and got my boat out. I ended up with a net which was so badly damaged that the repairs were almost the price of a new one.

Grace took all that in her stride. What I didn't realize was that bad weather did get to her, more than she let on. The aluminum boat I had bounced around pretty badly in rough water. She brightened up when the fishing in outside waters played out and we moved to more protected waters.

After the end of the third season Grace and I were driving from Ladner into Vancouver when she said, "By the way. I thought it over and I'm not going out with you next year." Just as casually as that.

"What? ....Why not? You wanted to give up office work and go fishing."
"If you're going to fish where you do I'd just as soon get back into office work." I had to accept that.

*I

I fished for the Cassiar Packing Company for three seasons, but I had increasing difficulty in getting repairs on the boat. They only had one boat shop, at Cassiar itself, and if you had to get repairs you were expected to take the boat there. They didn't have many mechanics for their fleet of boats and you'd find yourself tied up there for days at a time. The same with their other services - which they weren't able to maintain to any extent along the coast. It's a major consideration if you're stuck somewhere, broken down, during an opening.

During '79 I had fished herring on the Queen Charlottes for B.C. Packers. When I went into Port Edward to get the settlement, the manager of B.C. Packers there wanted to know why I delivered herring to them but wouldn't deliver salmon. He knew I couldn't deliver salmon on the rental agreement I'd signed with Cassiar."Why haven't you ever come to us for a B.C. Packers boat?"

"Well, Sonny Nelson was the first person I raised the matter of getting a boat with. And he laughed in my face." I said.

"Oh, you started with the wrong guy at the wrong end. If you ever want to go fishing for us we'll see to it that you get one of our boats. We want people who can catch fish. We're not interested in what you did before."

I kind of doubted that but that winter I got a call from Dave Mayne to meet him at the B.C. Packers Convention in Richmond. He wanted to know what kind of boat I was
interested in and I told him I wanted one at least thirty six feet long and wanted it rigged for combination fishing.

"That'll cost you more money, probably in the order of fifty-five hundred dollars basic rent" he said.

"Well, that's fine. But I'd like to make sure that it's a good boat."

He said that the company was building a number of thirty-six footers and he would see I'd get a brand new one all rigged out for trolling and gillnetting for the basic rent of five thousand five hundred dollars. We shook hands on that deal. But when it came time for the boat to be supplied the following spring he phoned and told me I'd have to go to Port Edward to pick it up and that it would not be a new thirty-six footer but an older and smaller boat and that I'd have to rig it for trolling myself.

"What happened?" I asked him. He said he didn't have the authority to make such an arrangement for the company and that the new boats had already all been promised to other people. So that's what I had to accept.

I continued working with that rental boat until B.C. Packers sold their entire fleet. What happened was that the Federal government established what is now called the North Coast Native Fishermens Corporation. That corporation ultimately acquired all the boats and fishing licences of the B.C. Packers rental fleet. This arose in the winter of '81-'82 when I had been fishing on a B.C. Packers boat for two years.

Initially B.C. Packers told us that there had been some discussions about them disposing of their fleet but that those of us who were renting the boats would be able to stay on. But after a series of negotiations between the Federal government and B.C. Packers we got a letter saying that we would have a right to buy the boats we were renting but otherwise they would all be turned over to this North Coast Native Fishermen's Corporation the government was setting up.

Those of us who were going to lose our boats got together and had union representatives go along with us in meetings with the B.C. Packers management. But to no real avail. When they got to the point of finalizing the deal with the Federal government we found out that they had made no provisions whatsoever to protect those of us fishing on the rental boats. Those fishermen between sixty and sixty-five years of age would be allowed to rent their boats until they reached sixty five, when they were expected to retire and the boat would be turned over to the new corporation. The rest of us weren't considered at all.

We approached the federal government with the proposal that the non-Indian fishermen should be given some of the same kind of consideration that the Indian fishermen would be getting. That those fishing on B.C. Packers boats should be allowed to rent them until they retired or, if that wasn't acceptable, that the government should help them with boat financing. We held that if the government was advancing something like twelve million dollars to the North Coast Native Fishermen's Corporation to acquire fish boats they should provide those of us who were already fishing some kind of a low interest loan to buy our boats.
The federal officials said they were not prepared to do that. And that they weren't prepared to consider any modifications in the disposal of the boats unless we got the agreement of the North Coast Native Fishermen's Corporation, who were going to be handling the whole transfer. Its directors were drawn from the leaders of various north coast tribal councils, including people from the Nishga villages, the Gitskan villages and from some of the Tsimshian villages.

Some developments related to that boat transfer are important to mention, although they are difficult to talk about.

Of the rental fishermen who were going to lose their boats because of this deal quite a few were Japanese-Canadian. A number of them had lost their own boats during the World War Two internment and felt very much as if they were going through the same experience again.

The union held a public meeting on the whole issue in Vancouver. George Hewison, then the Secretary-Treasurer of the U.F.A.W.U, explained the union's position on behalf of those who were going to be displaced. After George got through explaining why provisions should be made for non Indian fishermen displaced in this transfer Jimmy Gosnell got up and launched into of a real tirade. He's quite an orator, Gosnell. A person should have a tape recording of some of those speeches. He was a spokesman for the North Coast Native Fishermen's Corporation and represented the Nishga in the negotiations.

Gosnell said that the union never listened to what he said. That this transfer of boats to Indian fishermen was a thing they were doing to protect their people from non-Natives. He dished up the line that Indians had built the fishing industry and that others had come in and taken advantage of the Indians. He put forward this line about Indians versus non-Indians, who in this case were simply workers and fishermen.

He tore into the union. He even raked up the war with Japan so that it became a virtually racist attack. He talked about Japan's role in World War Two and related that to the Japanese-Canadian fishermen at the meeting, almost all of whom had been born in Canada. At one point he said, "Now you've got to bite the bullet." He used that phrase.

I remember Ken Maeda, who was sitting beside me, just sucking in his breath and hardly being able to believe what he was hearing. It left a very bitter feeling among the Japanese-Canadian fishermen who were there, to hear that sentiment crawling into the debate and being voiced again openly. When Gosnell had divested himself of his tirade he got up and stalked out of the meeting.

Eventually the North Coast Native Fishermen's Corporation acquired all those boats and licences - with the exception of a handful sold to those rental fishermen who were able to borrow enough money to buy their boats from B.C. Packers. On an average the boats and licences were valued at something over seventy thousand dollars a piece, which was more than the people using them could come up with. Many of them were older fishermen. Possibly thirty of the two hundred-thirty odd boats were sold to individuals who had previously fished with them. The balance went to the Northern Native Fishermen's Corporation.
I was in my late fifties and had been determined not to buy a boat. I'd much sooner have worked on a share or rental basis. I didn't want to get involved in the major financial debt of buying a boat at my age and have all the worries about having to pay it off. But I had already invested something like twenty-five thousand dollars in navigational equipment and trolling gear on the boat. I found that I'd perhaps recover twenty cents on the dollar if I tried to sell that equipment. Many of the other fishermen took that loss because they couldn't see any way to finance buying the boat. They just had to leave fishing for good.

Sometime in early April we got the final notice. We either had to buy the boat by the first of May or turn it back to the company. So at the last moment I decided to buy the boat and got a loan and got myself into debt. I wound up paying the company seventy three thousand for the boat and licence.

I sold the lot beside my house here in Ladner which my father had pushed me into buying forty years ago. Without that we would still be pretty deep in debt. But I would never have made it if Grace hadn't been working full time and the fact that our children were grown and on their own. These last years we lived very frugally too.

After I'd bought the boat I thought about what I should name her and ran through the roster of my family members. But then it struck me that my grandmother, who I had always been close to, had been the original fisherwoman of the family in B.C. So I named my boat the *Emma S.*

I'm sorry that I haven't had much opportunity to work with my three sons. I did fish part of a couple of seasons with my youngest son, Nick. We get along well. No problems at all when fishing. John, my second eldest, has got his own boat and we've fished all over the coast together as travelling companions. But I've never actually fished together with him.

Bruce, the oldest, is capable of doing just about anything connected with fishing. I know it and he knows it. He's done everything up to and including being a skipper on seine boats and has done very well at it. We occasionally have a few sharp exchanges about how some thing should be done, this way or that. But most of the time I let him have his way because he generally has a better idea of what has to be done than I do. Even if its about six of one and half a dozen of the other I tend to give way to him.

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One of the most difficult things for me after returning to fishing has been to divest myself of union responsibilities. Not that I want to distance myself from the union; I want to do my share or more. I carry organizational literature with me when I'm fishing and sign up people and am still active in committees of the union. But many members find it difficult to accept that I'm really not an officer of the UFAWU anymore and I'm constantly bombarded with questions and arguments about one policy or another when I'm out fishing.
It's sometimes hard to think of myself as no longer part of the union leadership. I sometimes feel that things should be done somewhat differently than they were. But I don't fully know all that is involved in the contract negotiations now. You really can't know everything involved, the ins and outs of negotiations, when you are out fishing.

Sometimes I knew that certain developments were taking place and was powerless to do anything about them. It's that feeling you have, after thirty years of doing the work, that somehow you're still supposed to be steering the thing - when you're actually not.

Leaving the union leadership was almost as difficult for me as leaving fishing to work for the union was in the first place. The first years I was an officer of the union I was continuously thinking like a fisherman -whether there would be a good or a poor run, where I would have fished that season and so on. I'd think and even dream about it."Why aren't I out there fishing?" I'd think after an especially snarky day around the office. Thirty years later it was exactly the other way around. I was out fishing and I'd have the problems of union work on my mind. I still do. But I've come to accept that it's not up to me to direct policy anymore.
REFLECTIONS

The UFAWU has faced some serious setbacks during the last decade or so. There are now a number of canneries and fresh and frozen fish processing plants which operate non union. There's the Seven Seas plant right along the river in Ladner and they have managed to operate non union since 1978 or so.

There are a lot of aspects to how that came about and I don't know if I can nail them all down. But one of the reasons is that the fishing and canning season is so much shorter today. In the past we could count on four to five months of organizing time when the plants were open. While that wasn't true for all of them some plants would open in late June and continue operating into November. But in the last ten to fifteen years the fishing season has been cut to about a half of what it was, and the canning season is even less than that. There have been years recently when a lot of the fish plant workers couldn't even get twelve weeks work throughout the entire year to qualify for unemployment insurance. So it's increasingly difficult to keep up with organization while the plants are in operation.

The owners of the Seven Seas operation got their plant established with the support of fishermen living here. They needed permission from the municipality to set up their plant in Ladner and asked union fishermen to sign a petition to allow them to build on the promise that the plant would be unionized. But during the very first strike which occurred after they had started up they began buying fish from boats which were strikebreaking. Had there been stronger organization on the fishing grounds we probably could have prevented that. But once Seven Seas got away with it they decided to go for a non union operation. It's a plant that processes some trawl-caught fish, does herring and some specialty fish for a month here and three weeks there. It operates so periodically that they turn over their shore crews frequently. Those workers who wanted it to remain a union plant just weren't rehired.

There's also no doubt that companies have increasingly made use of labour legislation to prevent or defeat union organization. The extent to which union certification has come to be the determining factor in the existence of a union, and the use of laws which facilitate the decertification of unions has increasingly worked against organization. The laws used against unions by companies have gotten more and more sophisticated over the years.

There are also the lessons which can be drawn from the Ocean Fish operations, which remain unorganized despite having plants right in our backyard. They have a large frozen fish processing plant on Commissioner Drive on the Vancouver waterfront and a fair sized canning operation out in Richmond. The Ocean Fish plant became non union when the current operators bought the operation from Queen Charlotte Fisheries, which we had fully organized. When the UFAWU tried to get successor rights as the bargaining agent for the workers in that plant the new management beat us off by arguing that they were a
different company. After drawn out proceedings before the Labour Relations Board the Board ruled in the company's favour. So they became non union. By then there had been a lot of crew turn over and we never did manage to get that plant organized again.

Ocean Fish has paid the same basic rates established by the UFAWU in our contract negotiations with unionized plants. They've also stayed fairly close to the union contract on hours of work. They do have a system of rehiring by seniority but it is pretty well at the discretion of the company. I talked to some of the people working at their cannery in Richmond a few years ago and the attitude of many of them working on the dock was 'If I can get the benefits of the contract without having to pay union dues and possibly being involved in strikes I'm okay'. Some said that they wouldn't handle scab fish during a strike but the fact is that most of them did exactly that during the last strike we had in the industry. It was a completely opportunistic attitude many of them had.

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One of the main things that I, and a host of others, worked for over the years was to try to unite all the elements in the fishing industry. Out of the welter of individual organizations based on gear, based on race, based on geographic area etc., we built one quite substantial and influential union. Only to find that in the last decade or so it has disintegrated to the point where we now have almost as many and as disparate associations of fishermen as there were prior to 1945. So it might be fair for anyone to ask now, objectively, "Didn't you fail completely?"

The vision that I had of one big union in fish, a vision I shared with so many other people, some before my time and some since, hasn't come about. In fact the UFAWU is in quite a weak position today in a whole range of areas. But the struggle isn't over.

There are now discussions going on about whether the Newfoundland Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, which has since merged with the Canadian Autoworkers Union, might bring our union in under a merger. I've always been reluctant to have the UFAWA operate under someone else's aegis. It isn't a concern about leadership by individuals like Bob White, who has been a militant trade unionist and a Canadian willing to fight to establish independence from the American Internationals. My reluctance is about fishermen being part of another union which covers workers in an array of different industries, ranging from airline workers to autoworkers. I think there is a need for a union of fishermen and allied workers which is distinct unto itself. Because fishing is different, in its many aspects, from even the other maritime industries.

I'm still a wholehearted believer that when trade union organization is handled properly, there is full participation of the membership in determining the course of the union. Perhaps it has to do with the kind of education that a trade union can provide, so that those who are participants, however large or small their participation may be, become aware of the strength they have by taking on the necessary tasks themselves. Although I always believed in that approach, I can't say that I always lived by it. There were times when I felt that I had to get in there and direct things myself. But on balance I think that
more than just most of the time we tried to create a style of organization that encouraged members to take up roles in the union and make it their union.

But in terms of the economic struggle I think that I, in conjunction with many others, generally did as much as any one person could do. With a few exceptions I don't think that I would change very much in what I tried to do and did do during my term in the leadership of the UFAWU.

One question which has always been in the back of my mind is whether I might have accomplished more if I'd moved to the east coast and stayed for a decade or so when we started organizing there. At the time I had established a 'reputation', if you like. People in the Maritimes had a respect for that reputation even if they didn't know the man as yet. The UFAWU had the experience and qualifications to organize east coast fishermen more effectively than anyone else and if I had established myself there it might have been possible to accomplish what otherwise was impossible. I say that with lingering doubts as to whether anything or anyone could have accomplished the job under the conditions we faced at that particular time and place.

I've sometimes asked myself if there was any way we could have headed off our conflicts with the T.L.C. and Canadian Labour Congress during the cold war period. I'd have to say "I doubt it" - not without having given up our union's integrity and organization and handing it over to people with virtually no principles. We could not have accepted the dictums of the then leadership of the C.L.C. and still kept a union that meant anything. If there was a failing in that I guess history will indicate what it was.

I'd still like to think of myself as participating, if even to a minor degree, in issues affecting the union and the fishing industry, from fishing regulations to environmental concerns to legislation on benefits for fish plant workers. There may be a role for me to play still. In that respect I don't think my life is over yet. At least I hope not.

I see all kinds of things undone in the fishing industry. For instance, the battles we've had with our government to get them to stand up to the Americans on international treaties which affected the livelihood of fishermen. Our union was a pretty major player in that respect. While we didn't win all of what we asked for we did force the hand of the Canadian government and got Canadian fishermen something better than Ottawa otherwise would have settled for. That pressure will have to be kept up by the coming generation because it's going to be necessary.

I don't think it's gilding the lily to say that politicians of all stripes in Ottawa and Victoria told us "However I feel about your position, you certainly have one of the most effective lobbying groups in the country." Yet we lacked ways to carry the lessons we had been learned back to the entire membership of the locals.

I always considered that my work was making a contribution not just to questions of wages and prices in the fishing industry, but toward a broader goal in some sense. That in the long haul my work might make some difference in how well and how quickly we might be able to make a transition to a better kind of system. Being a part of the Communist Party gave me a longer term perspective on the changing nature of the
struggle against capitalism and what I hoped and expected would ultimately be the transition to socialism.

There is no question in my mind that we need political and social change so that we aren't forever bound to live under a dog-eat-dog capitalist system. I don't buy the idea that all effective political activity depends on whether people are elected to legislative office or not. I still think that there is a need for a party which bases itself on the working class. Not that the working class can solve everything on its own. But to make changes in our system can't be done by following someone else's ideas and strategies.

A lot of us have had our concepts of what socialism is, or can be, shaken to the roots in recent years. Some people in the party have gone overboard and feel that everything they believed or did in the past was wrong and that there is no longer a role for a political organization like the Communist party. Others are saying, 'No, that's not the case. We have to learn the lessons of our own mistakes.' But I think there is general agreement that for too long and in too many ways the Communist Party of Canada was basing itself on strategies which developed in other countries under other conditions but which were not applicable to Canada.

In more personal matters, I sometimes wonder what would have happened if I'd have gone back into the fishing industry sooner and not spent thirty one years in full time union work. I started out as a salmon gillnetter and soon became involved in trawling - and I loved it. During most of my time working for the union I always wanted to go back to working on the boats. If I'd have pursued that, how would it have affected my life? You never really know how decisions are going to affect you down the road.

Despite my life long ties with Port Guichon and the Fraser we finally moved to Lasqueti island a little over a year ago. Delta has changed drastically over the years; Port Guichon is no longer a fishing and farming community where you know almost everyone. It's become a back bedroom of Vancouver. A lot of the feelings I had about it, as the place where I grew up were no longer applicable.

So after the end of the 1989 fishing season Grace and I made a trip through the Gulf Islands, to Saltspring, where my uncle still lives, and to Saturna and up to Valdes island looking for a place we might move to. We found that they were all becoming extensions of the city, with rapidly growing populations and high property prices. Cathy Schultz, a cannery worker who at one time was a vice president of the union, had asked me during the '89 strike what I thought of Lasqueti island as a place to live, because she and her husband had an idea to settle there. That piqued our interest so we went up to take a look at their place and in the process investigated three or four other properties for sale. The very first one we looked at, this big log house with a huge garden, I saw Grace's face just light up. So, by the end of our four day stay we had decided to move to Lasqueti and had put a down payment on the place.

Lasqueti is what I remember Saltspring island being like in earlier days. It's not a fishing community as such but its population is small, people get to know each other and they nod and talk to each other wherever they may be. Lasqueti doesn't have the amenities
you'd find in town but it's a quiet yet interesting place to live. We feel good about being here. It's what we consider home now.

As for my family, there are a lot of things I would have liked to have been able to do with my kids and for them, particularly when they were starting out to earn their own living. I'd like to have been able to provide them with a few more alternatives; it seemed that they were just thrust into fishing. How much they've thought about it I don't know. John was enrolled in an apprenticeship program and was hoping to become a carpenter some day but he is back fishing now. Barbara is working in the union welfare and benefit office where she once was dedicated to fishing and wanted to become a seineboat skipper. But all in all, things haven't worked out too badly.

Despite all the times when I couldn't be with them when they were growing up I always felt very close to our kids. I was happy that their understandings, not so much followed my views but at least took an interest in them in their own ways. They've developed a good working class outlook. Now with the grandchildren coming along, it's a pleasure, as far as I'm concerned. I'm happy in the thought of having raised a family.

I've thought of the future in regards to my children and grandchildren and I think that the road forward is there for them. Of my children, three are not only active in the union but have become politically active as well. My grandchildren will have to consider whether they want to get involved in left political activity and I think that they may give a good account of themselves. I'm not enthusiastic about the idea that my great grandchildren may have to fight the same kinds of battles we did. I hate to think that we'll have to go through all this forever. But I'd rather see that than have grandchildren and great grandchildren who could only look for something for themselves and say to hell with the rest of the world.

The future of the Canadian working class is going to be a pretty rocky road. I've had some of the stars knocked out of my eyes about how long it would take to achieve and secure certain gains. But I still see history as a generally forward movement, despite all kinds of set backs taking place. I don't think it's going to be possible for the tyrants and those who consider nothing other than their own fortunes or the fortunes of the multinational corporations - I don't believe that they're going to be able to manipulate the world forever.

So, all in all, if someone were to ask me, "Well, would you do it again?" I'd say "Yeah, I'd do it again. I'd try to do it better if I could but I'd be willing to tackle it."

End
APPENDIX: MY FIFTIETH FISHING SEASON

Herring Madness
In January and early February of 1985 we were getting ready to go out herring fishing. The work involved isn't extensive but it's painstaking. Mark, my son-in-law, and I had to drag out all the herring gear and pick out what could be repaired and what had to be discarded. The herring fishery for our district was supposed to be conducted somewhere in the vicinity of Denman Island that year but we weren't sure where or when. As usual, the Department of Fisheries doesn't give us that information in advance.

We loaded the boat with the herring nets and outboard motors and equipment and towing the skiff we took off for Nanaimo to see if we could get any further information on the opening. Then we headed up to Nanoose and finally wound up in Deep Bay. When we pulled in there weren't that many boats yet so we were able to get a berth at the floats. Within a day or two every berth was loaded, with boats tied up to each other so deep that those who were in first couldn't get out if they wanted to.

The discussion among fishermen was whether there was even going to be a herring fishery there that year or not. The price of herring hadn't been established and negotiations were still going on. The boats were waiting for that and an announcement from the Fisheries as to when and if there would be an opening.

The present day herring fishery arose due to the market for herring roe as a gourmet dish in Japan. Before that almost all herring was processed in the reduction plants which were scattered along the coast. They reduced the herring into meal and oil and it wound up as an ingredient in poultry and livestock feed. The carcasses of the herring which have been stripped of their roe are still used for reduction purposes.

Herring seining at one time was a relatively relaxed kind of fishery. Not that there wasn't a lot of hard work involved and not that there wasn't any competition. During the early 1950s there were about forty seiners fishing herring on the whole coast. That was fishing for reduction herring. They fished on the tides and would lay at anchor when the tides were wrong. The competition would be there for the best schools but if somebody happened to get a good set they'd call the other boats over to come on their cork line. If there was more than they could handle they would share it around.

The difference was that they knew they had their five days a week of fishing. And it lasted three or four months, starting in the southern area and gradually working their way north.

Now the coast is effectively divided up into five areas for herring seining and you can only fish one area in a year. When the fishing actually begins its become a rat race. And it will probably remain that way until we can come up with a licensing system to bring back a balance of the number of boats and fishermen that it would be reasonable to have. It just doesn't make sense that an entire year's fishery should last only a day.

The seiners were on the usual drop-of-a-hat notice that at any moment the fisheries could be opened. When they did open it it was with the sudden announcement:"It's open now". That is really something to see, a hundred seiners all running around trying to find
a place to set, knowing that the fishery may be closed within a few hours, just as
suddenly as it was opened. And that that would be it.

The area opened was a strip about five or six miles long and three or four miles wide.
That's where all the fishing took place. The herring were schooled up getting ready to
spawn. I was in amongst the seine fleet with our boat when they were ready to let go and I
had to get out of there. There were seines going out in all directions, boats were cutting
each other off. It was a madhouse!

There was a huge packer fleet out in Deep Bay. It seemed like there were close to a
crash of gillnetters there - I think there were in
hundred packers with their strobe lights on, waiting to handle that catch from the seine
and the gillnet fleets. They have regulations to keep the packers off the fishing grounds
now, otherwise there isn't going to be any room to fish.

There were over a hundred seiners and a crush of gillnetters there - I think there were in
excess of five hundred gillnetters in that same small area along the shore of Denman
Island and up towards Comox. The gillnet opening came during that day and lasted for
six or seven hours. We managed to find a spot where we had room to set out our net
without crossing over somebody else's gear. The herring nets were so close that we barely
had room to run our skiff around the net. You're going broadside to the net, with the net
coming in over one side of the skiff and going out over the other side. We were one of
the few who were pulling by hand; everybody else had mechanized rollers and shakers on
their skiffs.

There were fish in the net right off the bat and we figured we'd have a fairly good catch.
By the time we had gotten to one end of the net and were preparing to turn around we had
perhaps a ton and a half of herring on board. But in that short period someone had run
over our net. We didn't even see it happen but obviously it was another skiff going full
bore. He'd cut our cork line in two places and it had stripped back several fathoms in
either direction. So we had to haul up, go back to the boat and put on another net during
the opening when every hour counted.

By the time we got back to our spot the others weren't shaking a heck of a lot. So we
ran about a mile and a half to the east and it turned out there were still herring there. Then
it was a question of trying to get space to set our net. The competition is such that unless
you know the particular fishermen the usual thing is for them to tell you that there isn't
any room.

We had an argument about that until I finally said, "Look, we're going to set here
anyway so you better tell us where your lines are or else we'll end up over the top of
them."

No sooner had we gotten the net in than somebody else sets his gear right over top of
ours. It was so tight that we couldn't get our net up for about an hour and half, by which
time the opening was just about over. It looked like a real skunk as far we were
concerned.

We delivered our fish and the only bright spot was that MacMillan Fish had raised the
price to twenty two hundred dollars a ton. Still, with our catch of a couple of tons we
figured we'd bombed out. But there was a short opening the next day and we got another
three and a half tons. With that we were able to come out with a couple of thousand dollars a piece.

For us that fishery was over. But a part of the fleet took off and headed north. They were members of heavily financed pools which have acquired licences to fish herring in different areas.

Actually being able to catch some fish is the best part of it. The worst part is sitting in a place like Deep Bay for ten days waiting for the fishery to open. There were three of us on the boat, which is built for two men at the most, and we'd be crawling over top of each other.

There is absolutely nothing to do. You can take a walk along the beach, which I did every day. I went out on the spit where the reduction plant used to be, where we had delivered dogfish when I was on a dragger as a kid of seventeen. There was nothing left of it. Instead, there was a cluster of luxurious homes. I finally met somebody who had been there long enough to be able to show me where the reduction plant had been. There were a few pieces of the boiler left, that was all.

During the previous season I remember laying in bays in the Charlottes for three weeks waiting for the fishery to start. People get a bit squirrely. You read all you can read. You do all the things on the boat you can think of doing to keep yourself busy. You go out and dig a few clams or jig a few fish to eat. You go around and talk to people. It may sound great but it can almost drive you around the bend.

After herring fishing we came home and stripped that gear from the boat and I started getting ready for the coming salmon season. The balance of the spring was pretty well taken up with that. There is always work to do on the boat. There's a lot of work needed to make sure that all the running gear is in shape; drums and hydraulic equipment and gurdies and what have you. You've got to clean and check everything right down to the bilges so you don't have problems when you're finally out fishing up the coast somewhere.

We used to figure on having three gillnets. A sockeye net, a coho net and a net for spring salmon. You could make do with that, though you might have a spare net standing by. But with the kind of fishing we do today, moving from one area to another, you have to have three nets for sockeye alone. Nets of different mesh size and colour for different areas.

Barkley Sound has runs of fish weighing less than five pounds. Elsewhere there are bigger fish and you've got to have a different net for them. If you fish Barkley Sound, you want a net with a mesh of four and half inches in diameter but in some other places, like in the Gulf of Georgia here, with seven pound fish coming in, you want something closer to five and three quarter inches in diameter. You also have different colour nets. We use a darker green for fishing off shore and a light green at the mouth of the river. That's keyed to the different colours of the water. It makes it more difficult for the fish to see the net. The darker coloured nets don't work near as well when you're at the mouth of a river, where you have fresh and sea water mixing. You've got to have heavier gear for fishing outside and finer gear for fishing inside the Skeena.
The upshot is that I’ve now got ten salmon nets I fish with. They’ve all got to be hauled out, looked at, repaired and gotten into shape for the season.

We’ve had to build our own net shed because little by little all the companies have closed up most of their net lofts. We used to have a net loft here in Port Guichon which B.C. Packers kept. But they’ve sold that property to land developers.

When it comes to repairing nets you have to spread them out on a rack. We’ve set up racks on our dock so we can work on the whole net there. You can stand out there in the pouring rain with your slickers on and do it. But most of us try to find the nicer days to do that kind of work and do something else when it’s pouring rain. We get enough of that during the season when we have to work in miserable weather.

I’ve got trolling gear that I can work on inside. You usually take all the old hooks off and put new ones on. It also means making choices between the kinds of gear that you’re going to use. We use a combination of three basic kinds of lures - flashers, plugs and hootchies. But each type has endless variations. A plug is something in the shape of a fish. They used to be made out of wood and fishermen would paint them up themselves according to what they thought worked best. Now they’re all made in Japan out of plastic in every variety of colour and design.

We use a lot of what are called hootchies, plastic devices which hang like a skirt over the hook. Some represent squid, others needlefish and yet others octopus; various things the salmon feed on. The Japanese manufacturers are always coming out with new styles of hootchies. And we still have spoons and flashers which are usually hooked on one and a half to two fathoms out on the leader with the hootchy thirty five to forty inches beyond that.

So, every piece of gear - and there are hundreds of pieces - has to be gone over and cleaned or replaced. Usually you have to change the purlon leaders; they tend to get frayed and get kinks in it. Each piece of gear has to be worked over. At least you can do that in the house or in the net shed out of the weather but it’s a time consuming job. It’s a matter of varying working on the boat and working outside on the nets when the weather is good and on troll gear inside when it’s not.

So we did that from mid March to the beginning of June. During the last few days before I left to go north I was still puttering around, fixing up things that I hadn’t gotten around to doing. If you were to do nothing else you’d probably get it done in a month and half to two months. But there are always other things which intervene. There are union meetings that have to be attended to and I try to get everything that has to be done around the house repaired before I leave in the spring.

Trolling

We started out from here on the twelfth of June in four boats: myself, my son who has an older wood gillnetter-troller, my brother and a nephew. We were making our way up to the north coast which was going to open up for trolling on the twentieth of June. I was headed for the Charlottes and the other three were going to fish around Dundas Island, which is north of Prince Rupert.
We left here on a beautiful day and everything seemed to be fine. My wife had decided to take a bit of a vacation and go along with me for the first bit. My deck hand, a young fellow from Williams Lake, was going to finish his high school exams and meet us in Prince Rupert. It seemed like it was going to be a beautiful trip but we didn't get past Welcome Pass before I got a call from my brother that he was having problems with his fuel pump. I myself couldn't keep one of the alternators charging and then it quit altogether. So we put in at Secret Cove for a couple of days while repairmen came out. I had endless breakdowns with that later on during the season.

By the time we pulled out of Secret Cove we could see that the weather was beginning to change. So the next night we put in at a little bay behind what we call the Ragged Islands, not far beyond Lund. It was still fairly good weather and the next day we got past the Yuculta Rapids and into Johnstone Strait but as we approached Alert Bay the wind started to howl. As we started heading into Queen Charlotte Strait it came on strong. My brother and nephew headed into Port Hardy but John and I decided that we would put in at Blunden Harbour. At one time there was a fish plant as well as an Indian village there but it's almost deserted now.

We lay in the harbour listening to the wind howl and even inside it was so rough that you had a hell of a time getting alongside anyone. The next day the wind abated and we went on, crossed Queen Charlotte Sound, stopped in briefly at Namu for fuel and went on to the former B.C. Packers floats in Bella Bella for the night. Only four or five years earlier there was a fish buying station and camp, a general store, fuel station, net racks and so on there. But now there's nothing. There's barely a place to tie up and the floats are starting to fall apart.

We lay there overnight and I thought about when that place would have been crowded to the rafters at that time of the year. When boats were moving north to the fishing grounds there would be fifty to a hundred boats in there. But now most of the boats bypass it. The few who stop anywhere around there go into Shearwater where there's a pleasure boat marina and a pub.

The next day, as we were approaching Klemtu, coming around Junction Point, I could see two gillnetters fishing ahead of me. As I came by I could see that they were manned by a couple of Indian fishermen out for food fish.

In my mind's eye I remembered Klemtu when it was a booming cannery town where in one season they put through over a hundred thousand cases of salmon. They were running that cannery twenty four hours a day at one time and seiners and gillnetters had used Klemtu as their home port. There would have been shoreworkers who came in from all over the north coast. But during the last twenty years there's been no operation there at all. The machinery had been yanked out and the cannery buildings torn down.

I came into the narrow pass which separates Klemtu from the main channel and got on the radio until I raised somebody in Klemtu. I asked if any of the people I had known were still around. I mentioned a few names, one of which was Maryann Mason, who had been one of our union shop stewards there. "Oh yes, she's working in the band office here," they said.
So we talked on the radio and I asked her about her children, especially about her son Ernest who I'd known as a child. At that point Ernie cut in on the radio and said, "You passed me. We're out here fishing" "Was that you, with that brand new gillnetter?" I says, sort of surprised. "Well I've been gillnetting for about fifteen years now," he answered. Somehow I still pictured him as a kid.

Maryann asked if I was going to go right by and not drop in for a visit. But we were already a couple of days late getting up to Prince Rupert and I didn't want to miss the opening of the troll season. That's a commentary on how the fishery has changed. During the season you're either busy fishing or you're travelling from one spot to the next or you're holed up waiting for openings. You don't get a chance to put into places like Klemtu just for a visit.

We got into Prince Rupert but didn't spend any time there. I topped off with ice for the troll trip in the Charlottes. Ronny, my deckhand, came on board and by eight o'clock in the evening of the same day we were on our way out, headed over to a small bay known as Squatterrie where we anchored overnight. Its the usual jumping off spot to cross over to the Charlottes. Most people would rather be there and leave just as day is breaking because you never know what kind of weather you are going to get at Rose Spit.

On a direct course across from the 'Triple Island light to Rose Spit you're going over some pretty shallow water. The 'peaks' in the center of Hecate Strait are as shallow as six and seven fathoms. With a tide running and any sort of a blow you can get breakers right out in the Strait. Even the larger boats don't want to get into that and it can be a dangerous spot for small boats.

As you come out of Bell Pass you begin to get the feel of it. If there's a heavy ground swell rolling in you begin to wonder whether you're going to make it that day or whether you should turn back.

You're watching the sky and everything to gauge what might be coming up. One of the problems is that the weather can change very fast. It may be a calm sky with no sign of scudding clouds for the first two hours, then all of sudden things can break loose. You compare weather conditions you've experienced in the past with what you're seeing at the time. I've often thought of the first crossing I made with the old B.C. Kid in the early forties. We had to lay in Captain's Cove for four days because we didn't have a radio and had no clue what the weather was like outside the cove.

I've got most of the modern navigational aids and listen to the weather service reports but I don't depend on them too much. Because they're not always that reliable. I can remember coming back on one occasion and the weather report is saying it's blowing fifteen to twenty knots at Rose Spit and Triple Island and Bonella. But I'm right there and it's blowing forty. Although I haven't got a weather gauge on the boat I know damn well it's a forty knot wind. The seas are breaking over the boat. You're always watching to see if the wind is with you or against you. You're looking to see the extent of the whitecaps and the spray. They give you an indication of how the wind is picking up. If the wind comes up the water is being blown into a froth.
With the kind of boat I have you notice pretty damn soon. These aluminum boats are a lot more 'quick' in the water than wooden boats. That is to say, they jump and buck and throw things around. Anything that isn't stowed away or tied down goes flying in all directions. If you've got a coffee pot on the stove tie it down to the stove rails with a piece of wire when the wind comes up. Otherwise it may jump off the stove and land upside down in the middle of the cabin floor.

You're also looking to see what kind of a tide you are going to get. Whether you are going to be bucking the tide or whether you've got the tide with you. The worst combination is a strong tide with the wind blowing against it. That can create one hell of a sea.

I usually try to travel at about eight knots with the engine turning at about twenty three hundred revs. But there are times when I've had to slow down to where the engine is turning at nine hundred to eleven hundred revs. You just buck along like that for hours on end taking eight or ten hours to do what you'd normally do in three. The stove is out and everything is soaking wet.

I've taken 'green water', a foot or so of solid water over the fore deck, and had the bow come up again. It seemed like the water rushed right over the wheelhouse but it's really not a full sea abroad the boat. These aluminum boats tend to bounce on top of waves like a seagull - unless you keep the power on. Then you'll drive her into the waves. You'd take something off the top. The first thing to go would be the stove pipe or the aerial poles, maybe the windows would be smashed out. You're forced to slow down.

John, my second eldest son, had a close call on one occasion during bad weather in the Strait of Georgia. He had a wooden gillnet boat and one sea lifted the peak of the cabin. The next sea pushed the front of the cabin right in, so he had to turn and run the opposite way. In other words, you can drown yourself by driving your boat too hard under bad conditions.

Rose Spit is a long spit of sand which sticks out of the northeastern tip of Graham Island in the Queen Charlottes. That extension of land, with trees on it, runs out quite a ways and then becomes just a great big sand bar which eventually breaks off into channels between some further sand bars. Off that are two buoy lights, one with a green and the other with a red light, anchored about five miles apart. You head for the outermost one and even a mile outside of that if there is any sort of a blow.

We generally go to a fish camp at a place called Seven Mile, about an hour's run outside the entrance to Masset There are some old government floats there but it's difficult to get in and out of until you learn the local conditions. It was pretty scary the first time I went in there.

Going into Seven Mile you see a red can-buoy about three quarters of a mile off shore. There is also a beacon with a light on it right on the rocks at the entrance. On both sides are huge kelp beds which extend along the shore line. You can travel pretty well along the edge of the kelp patches with the size of boats we have but you also have to watch that. Because if the weather is bad there can be breakers and you could end up on the rocks.
The entrance is so narrow that two boats can't go in abeam of each other. As you come in the channel between the kelp narrows right down and then there's a kelp patch in the very center. So you've got to take one side or the other. Both the channels are about the same depth but the larger boats don't like to go in at low water at all, it's that shallow. As you come through the seas are breaking over the rocks and sometimes almost over the beacon itself. It sure can be an ugly looking spot as you're approaching it. If you didn't know you'd find the depth of water to go through you'd swear that you were going to pile right up on the rocks.

Next day was the opening of the troll season. We went out and found there were boats extended all the way from Langara Island right back to Rose Spit. I quickly got a picture of where I should be fishing and where I shouldn't. I'd lost a few cannonballs off my troll gear but got into what turned out to be fairly good fishing that first day. The next day I ran into Masset so that my wife could fly home and go back to work.

It was good fishing, mainly nice sized coho with the odd spring salmon, with the occasional sockeye and pink. It turned miserable late in the afternoon, with a sea running that made it difficult to haul gear and dress fish, but by the end of the day it had calmed down. So we went into what is called McIntyre Bay and anchored about a half mile off shore of Tow Hill. It's not protected at all and if you get a westerly you can't stay there.

Not long after leaving that anchorage the next morning I developed transmission problems and wound up having to have my son tow me back to Seven Mile. If you run into serious difficulty on the trolling grounds around there you can usually get somebody to put you on a tow line and pull you in. But if you've had engine problems and think you may have them again you hate to put yourself in that position. We fishermen have a certain amount of pride in our ability to keep going and not have to take up anybody else's fishing time.

What's been happening in recent years is that all these smaller communities along the coast are being stripped of their marine services. There used to be two fish buying operations at Seven Mile and there was another fish camp and store out on Langara Island. That's all gone.

Along the west coast of Vancouver Island every little place - Winter Harbour, Kyuquot, Nootka, Tofino, and others - they all had more than one fish buying station and camp. Almost every fish company had some operations out there. Now they are all closed up. Once you leave Tofino there is virtually nothing now along the whole Northwest coast of Vancouver Island. On the mainland coast there are still some services at Sointula and Alert Bay. But after you leave Port Hardy there is nothing at all until you get to Namu. Places like Klemtu and Butedale and fish stations like Finn Bay and many more, all those places are all closed down.

Marine services have been cut back to nothing. Around the Charlottes, for any major mechanical work you've got to go across to Prince Rupert. There are some fishermen who are very handy in engine repairs, who've learned over the years and can do a lot of the work themselves. But I'm not one of them. Besides, you need the special tools and tackle
to do that work and you either have to pack the spare parts with you or have them flown in.

It means that fishermen depend upon more and more specialized and costly services to handle what they would have been able to do themselves in the past. The costs skyrocket, especially if you are in an out of the way place. There's only a limited number of technicians available and the pressure is on during the fishing season. So the fishing time you lose is that much greater.

The fish packers only come in to the Charlottes after the net fishing begins in the middle of July. So you have to deliver your troll catch to Prince Rupert. I had intended to make at least more troll trip before the gillnet season opened. But because of these breakdowns and not knowing if they'd really been corrected or not I decided I wouldn't gamble on another trip across to the Charlottes.

**Gilnetting**

My first gillnet opening that year was just off the mouth of the Skeena, between Lawyer and Genn islands. It was reasonably good fishing but almost immediately I ran into new problems. The electrical system aboard kept blowing the fuses and knocked out the drum while we had the net out. We had to get towed into the shipyard again. Finally we got that corrected and continued fishing.

Gillnetting around the mouth of the Skeena is very competitive. I don't go into the Skeena proper except on rare occasions, usually later in the season. That is mainly because of the huge tides and the amount of snags up there.

It puts me in mind of one of the oldtimers there who I've known for thirty five or forty years, Jack Tasaka. He probably knows that Skeena river better than most and has made up his own charts, where to make this or that set under particular conditions. But I've also seen him come in with practically nothing left but his cork line, having lost the best part of his net on the snags there.

So most of my fishing is done on the outside, sometimes at the mouth of the Skeena and other times three and four hours run further out. But this year I fished closer in. At the start of each week's opening I'd set off the mouth at what they call the Oceanic bar. It's usually a crush. There's a channel with eight or ten fathoms of water in it and the boats are lined up all the way along the edge of Smith Island waiting for the six o'clock start.

I try to check out the vicinity on my depth sounder, though you're never sure if what you're seeing on it actually are salmon. I consider the tide: if it's high water I'll get right in behind the big sand banks. Then you try to find the best possible opening amongst a fleet of four or five hundred boats, all maneuvering around looking for a spot to set.

It starts at six o'clock in the evening and the fleet begins to spread out a bit as people look for what we call 'the dark set.' Just as dusk is coming on and again just before first daylight. That's usually going to be your best set. The advantage of the 'dark set' is that the changing light values makes it harder for the fish to see the net. However, if you're fishing off shore your sets at night are not so good because of the phosphorescence in the water. It clings to the net and the fish can see it.
After that first twenty four hour opening I usually head out to Dundas Island. Conditions are rougher in the outside waters but you don't have the same crush of boats. There's space to set your net without worrying whether you're cutting somebody else off or somebody is corking you. I've put in some long miserable nights out there with a westerly or northwesterly blowing or a dead swell pounding the stern of the boat, battering you all night. But usually its fairly good fishing compared to working in the mouth of the river.

The first thing that you do before setting your net is to check the positions of all the other nets. If it's daylight and there's no fog or mist you can eyeball it and figure out where there is an opening. You're looking for a gap of about a half mile between the nets already out to drop your net in. At night it's sometimes very difficult to tell which way the nets are set. Some may be set more or less north and south while others may run more east and west. Some may be bunched up while others are out their full length. So what I generally do is to cruise the immediate area to see for sure that I've got an open spot to set in.

The most disgusting thing is when after you've cruised it out and have decided on the place to set, somebody else comes roaring in and sets in the spot you've picked and you've got to find another space.

After you've found a spot to make a set you drop the net over with a light buoy we call a Scotchman on the end of it. You set it out in just about a straight line and drop another buoy at the other end. Then you run back to the end you set first and stretch that out. You make sure everything is working right and then decide which end will be best to 'lay on'. You want the tide and wind and the weight of the boat to pull you away from the net. You don't want the boat dragged over the net.

You lay on the net for perhaps a half an hour or so, pull it taunt again, let go and run down to the other end to see if there are any fish getting into the net. There's not much point in staying some place if the fish aren't there. During the day time you can spot the fish up to two thirds of the way down on the net. At night I've got lights in the bow that allow me to see down into the water.

We sometimes 'chase the net'. The fish will come up to the net and gather along the edge without going into it. What we do is run from one end of the net to the other with the boat. That will sometimes scare them into the net. Sometimes it pays to chase your net but other times it has the exact opposite effect, it depends on the circumstances.

Sometimes you let go of the net and it just drifts but other times you keep it attached to the drum; 'laying to the net' as we call it. With the tides in the estuaries you are always straightening one end of the net or towing it out, otherwise it'll tend to bunch up. So you're travelling about doing that. You're looking for driftwood and logs and trying to prevent them getting in the net. You're making sure that the end of your net isn't tangled up with someone else's.

I usually don't like to leave the net in the water more than a couple of hours at a time. It depends on how tired I am. As the fishing goes on I may leave it in three or four hours at
a time if I figure that the fish are still hitting it or that it's time to take a bit of a rest. You haul the net in, pick the fish out and then set again.

The net is drifting so you have to consider the way the tide is taking you and then run back again. If you figure that the fish are moving, say to the east, you may move to where you think you can get them. You can drift at speeds ranging from half a knot to two and a half knots an hour. So, during a set you may have moved only a mile or you may have drifted six or seven miles.

The idea is to haul the net and pick the fish out as quickly as you can to get the net back in the water and fishing as soon as possible. There is usually only one of us working in the stern. Unless there are really a lot of fish two people back there mainly get in each other's way. So we alternate picking the net.

Taking fish out of the net isn't difficult once you get the hang of it. It's not easy on the hands, mind you. You wind up with little of your fingernails left by the time you've pulled out a few hundred fish. With the nylon gear it's easy to cut into your hands if you're not careful - but you can't be careful when you're trying to get fish out as fast as possible. If you get a really good set, and the fish come up in bunches, they can tangle the net around the lead line and twist over the cork line and every which way. But with a good catch you don't mind any difficulties you may have in picking the net.

The biggest problems I've had in picking the net are dogfish. Sometimes you get a lot of dogfish, or turbot and hake. All of them have razor sharp teeth. Unless you're particularly careful in taking them out the teeth will make a shambles of the net. Your hands will be in pretty bad shape.

Dogfish can just slash through that nylon web. They generally come up alive too. Mila, my black Lab, who accompanies me when I'm fishing, knows that I hate dogfish. She'll watch me pick them out of the net and insists that every dogfish that comes over the roller, she's got to have a chew at it before it goes back overboard. One night between Zayas and Dundas Islands I had about a hundred and fifty salmon but almost two hundred dogfish plus two hundred turbot, all in one set. We started picking that net about midnight and weren't through till about six in the morning. Mila was in the stern with me and by morning she could hardly move her jaws.

Our union negotiating committee was engaged in contract talks with the companies that year from about the middle of July till the first week of August. There were a number of membership meetings before the strike vote was taken and we did get into a short two day strike on the twenty-fifth of July. When the strike was called there was still a lot of work to be done on the waterfront and I spent some time on a floating picket boat, checking boats which were moving in and out of the harbour.

One of the contentious points was that a number of the seine boats had left port just prior to the strike deadline. They went out and anchored on the fishing grounds as far south as Hartley Bay while the balance of the fleet was tied up in port. When the companies came back with a better offer the strike was halted in mid flight and the fleet was told "O.K., you can go back fishing, pending a ratification vote on the new contract". But those boats which had stayed in Prince Rupert were caught short. When they got to
the fishing grounds all the best seine spots had been taken and fishing was already underway. So there was considerable dissatisfaction about that.

Besides that, the company offer we accepted was very low. The minimum guaranteed price for pinks was thirty two cents a pound and in the case of pinks the minimum price is the actual price paid. The minimum price for sockeye was set at a dollar and six cents a pound when the average price paid in previous year was in the order of a dollar fifty a pound. So there was a lot of dissatisfaction.

I wasn't very happy with the settlement myself. In fact I spoke against acceptance of the contract and told our members that if they didn't like the companies' offer they should reject it, regardless of what our negotiating committee recommended. When I was an officer of the union there were instances where we recommended acceptance and the membership voted to reject the offer, as well as the other way around. During the balance of the season I was still spending time with that issue. If I came into a fuel dock somewhere there'd often be somebody who would get into a discussion with me about it.

Not long after the strike was over the fishing played down so badly in the Skeena area that I decided to move down into Caamaño Sound. There was relatively good fishing there for chums with some pinks and sockeye mixed in. Just as that area came to a close it was announced that there was going to be an extension for gillnetting in area seven. So we wheeled on down through Myer's Pass and began fishing in Seaforth Channel. I fished there for a day before that closed and heard that there would be an extension in area eight. So we went there and found that the area had been open almost continuously for ten days. The upshot was that we kept on fishing or travelling for over two weeks without a stop.

There were days when we fished straight through, day and night. It seemed almost endless. What it boiled down to was trying to time ourselves so that we both got some rest.

Ronny [Homer's deckhand] wants to learn everything he can about fishing so I'd be explaining to him why I made a certain set in a certain position. That isn't always easy, because there are so many factors which enter into it. You're thinking back to experiences of when you fished that area before; where did you get the fish then and how. I keep a pretty detailed log of each fishing day and where the good sets were in any particular spot.

Let's say you're fishing off Pointer Island, which leads into Lama Pass. What I'd be looking for are signs of where the tide rips are along the edge of the shore. Salmon are always looking for ways to ease their travel. The water won't be running quite so fast off the beach as it will be further out. At times the fish will be travelling just at the edge of the tide rips, perhaps a net length off shore or perhaps more. Elsewhere, there are tide rips further out where arms or sub-inlets converge and the salmon will tend to travel close to that.

You also consider the weather conditions. The wind may push the fish closer to the beach or push them further off shore. You also watch what the other fishermen are doing as they pick their sets. If some boat has picked up his net and then gone back to where he put it in, but a net length further off shore, you consider what that might mean. You also
try to determine whether somebody else has just made a set in a particular spot and scooped up the fish there.

So it's a combination of experience of where you got fish in previous years and looking at the immediate conditions that's involved in deciding where to set. You try to judge it but often there just aren't any fish there. So then you move the net another length in or out from the beach or pick up and try to find a better spot.

You also try to judge when you've got all the fish you're going to get out of a spot, when you might as well pick up and move. It's also a matter of getting some rest. You get to the point where your judgement may be impaired, when the best thing to do then is to get a bit of rest and let your partner watch that the net doesn't get hung up on the beach or tangled up with somebody else. In other words, you get punchy. It's a pretty exhausting schedule.

While we were in the vicinity the Fisheries department opened up Roscoe Inlet. I didn't know how to fish the place because the last time that Roscoe inlet had been opened was fifteen or seventeen years previously. I arrived just as the boats were getting ready to set their gear. I saw an open space between a couple of seiners and gillnetters and slapped my net out and started getting fish right off the bat. But on the second day it played out because we were only fishing a small part of the salmon run heading up the inlet. Those of us who were there were catching fairly large quantities of chums.

It gives you a feeling of hope that maybe this area is going to come back. I think that the excessive logging which took place for a long time had some really bad effects on the spawning grounds. There are wash outs and log jambs and everything else which destroy the spawning gravels as far as the chum are concerned. So it's heartening to see some fish come back to these places.

Had there been the kind of prices we used to get - a dollar to a dollar and a quarter a pound- I would have done alright. But the minimum price for chums had been driven down over the previous five years to about fifty cents a pound. The earnings just weren't there to pay expenses and give us some income. It sounds like big money, talking about a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars of fish in a few days. But you've got to figure on the limited number of days you get to fish. You've probably got to average over a thousand dollars a fishing day in gross earnings in order to make any money at all. So although we were catching a lot of fish I decided I'd better get out of that area and down to where I get some sockeye at three time that price per pound.

We ended up at the top end of the Johnstone Straits adjacent to Port Hardy and found that there were virtually no sockeye being caught there. We heard that there were fish being caught around the north end of Cape Scott so I started back up that way. It was blowing a miserable westerly and we were creeping alongside the shore for some protection. Eventually we had to pull out into the open water.

I saw some boats coming out of Shadwell Pass and figured that they must know where the fishing was taking place there. This was in the open waters off the north end of Vancouver Island. We made our 'dark set' but after about an hour the tide turned and
we got tangled up with one of the other fishermen. We had been a mile and a quarter apart when the nets were set but the tide wrapped us together before we could pick up.

We spent the rest of the night trying to get the nets apart. He had eighty or so sockeye in his net and I had perhaps sixty. The balance were ripped off by sea lions. They were splashing and growling and ripping our nets apart. Sea lions are too powerful an animal to get caught in the net. A sea lion will just grab a salmon and - I don't know if they eat the web along with the salmon or not - but they just yard it out and all you find is a great big hole in the net afterwards.

Sea lions have been spreading up the coast from California over the years and I'm beginning to see them where I never saw one before. You can find whole herds of them right on the jetty at the mouth of the Fraser. Even as a young man I never saw them there. Some of the Gulf Islands are just loaded with them.

There are a few rabid fishermen who would say 'Kill them all.' But that isn't what most of us think. We just think that the seal and sea lion population should be kept under control, that there should be an annual harvest of them. It makes me wonder when I hear environmentalists going on about the preservation of the seals and the sea lions. If those same environmentalists had a bunch of wolves running around in their backyards threatening their livelihood they'd be the first ones out there with guns. But they want to stop us fishermen from keeping some sort of control over sea lions.

If porpoises robbed and ripped up our nets I'd probably feel the same toward them. But porpoises don't do that. I release those I can that get into my nets, although that doesn't happen very often. And the same with Killer Whales. I've seen pods of Killer Whales go right through the fleet at the mouth of the river and not get tangled up. They're eating salmon too but I don't begrudge them the feed of fish they're catching. They don't rob nets and they don't get tangled up in them. Very rarely anyway.

In any case, we weren't doing too well in that area so we ran all the way down from Johnstone Straits to Port Guichon. At home I changed nets and put aboard a three hundred fathom, ninety mesh net used for fishing in Juan de Fuca Strait. The sockeye were still coming in and there was going to be an opening there. That fishing area is just on the edge of the Pacific, on a line from Cape Flattery. You can't fish east of Sheringham Light, which is about three hours run west of Victoria.

Things Are Not As They Should Be

It is a different fishery from what it had been even a few years before. The Juan de Fuca fishery opened up mainly as a seine operation in 1946 with just a handful of seiners. It gradually built up to the point where a couple of hundred seiners are fishing there. Where we once had perhaps a hundred gillnetters, even as recently as the late seventies, this year there were something in the order of three to four hundred gillnetters there.

It gets pretty crowded. The people who've fished there for years had worked out a system which was put into the Fisheries regulations: that the seiners operate during the day and the gillnetters operate at night. When the seineboats are winding down for the day the practice is that the gillnetters move into the area to get ready. Now they begin to
form lineups at three or four o'clock in the afternoon even though they still have three or four hours more to wait.

One of the problems with so many boats is that we now have those referred to amongst fishermen as The Turkey Gang. They are a group which doesn't intend to respect what have been the customary arrangements worked out amongst fishermen. That you don't rip the next guy off by splitting distances in openings between the nets, and that kind of thing. This bunch doesn't intend to take their turns at setting and they try to drive others away.

There's room for about nine gillnets in line from the Vancouver Island shore out to the International boundary line, which runs down the middle of Juan de Fuca Strait. The practice has been that the first person in one of those lineups takes his choice of where he wants to set and then the next person and so on. But members of these gangs can come along after the line ups are formed and just push in. Or they'll set right in front of somebody whose turn it is. We had a taste of that in Juan de Fuca.

I had gone over and asked the first boat in line and he said he was going to set north from that spot. So I would set south. My son, who had come along on his own boat, would set north after the other fellow had his net in. Up until about a half hour before the opening there were still only three of us there. Then all of a sudden out from the beach come nine boats.

As we started to set they came over and started shouting and hollering. I told my deckhand, "Pay no attention. They haven't got anything to say to us." We set out our net and they corked us. But unfortunately for them they were too close to the outer boundary and they'd no sooner gotten their nets out when they were drifting over the line and a patrol boat came along and arrested one of them. Then the rest got on the blower and accused us of having called the patrol boat on to the scene, which we hadn't.

Later that same night I spent a good hour finding another location to fire my net out only to have one of these guys come charging over and shine his spot light in my face and demand to know what I thought I was doing.

"Fishing, what else?" He started screaming at me that I was too close to his net. 'You'll never get another fucking set here,' he screamed.

When he said that I responded in the same terms and told him that he better get his boat back to his net before he had some trouble from me. What kind? I'd have taken hold of his net and towed it out of the way if he'd have kept it up. That's the kind of thing that comes to your mind when somebody is threatening you and your livelihood.

If you are out there alone and are faced by a group like that the reality can be that you would never get a set where you'd be clear. Because if one guy didn't cork you another one would. And they'd keep on doing that until you were driven out of the area. That's why I said we might have to band together to defend ourselves. If you get into that kind of a corking match, which I've seen happen in the past, people spend more time corking each other than in catching fish.

But even without the verbal threats and harassment, it gets to be a miserable way to fish. A lot of people just don't want to work that way. They'll back down and say "To hell
with it.' They'll move out of the area rather than face that situation all the time. That was happening to people I knew, to people who had been fishing all their lives. They were being forced to go to the back of the lines and take the worst positions. I noticed one of the older fishermen in a lineup about two miles back was frozen right out by that method of intimidation.

There is a reaction against fishermen pulling those kinds of stunts. But it depends on how many are ganging up in the particular area. These groups act like that area is theirs and you better not try to fish it. It isn't that that hasn't happened before with one or two individuals but it seemed as if there was a concerted effort by that group in Juan de Fuca Strait.

In that setting, in a few instances, we got into some swearing matches where threats were exchanged. That changes the nature of the fishery so much for the worse. It's always been a competitive industry and everybody expects that. You're not playing games, its your livelihood. But with a gang like that you've almost got to be part of their group to fish there. I got into discussions with people I knew who had been fishing for a good many years. They all felt that we had to find some way to deal with groups like that. If we could reason with them, fine. If not we'd have to band together just to hold our own.

In any case, in mid August it was announced that there would be no further fishing in Juan de Fuca Strait but that there'd be another day opening in the Gulf of Georgia. So we high tailed it back home to put a shallower net aboard. Fisheries gave us an occasional day and night opening and we waiting out the closures at home in Port Guichon. We fished into September like that.

Once the sockeye season was over the question was where the fall chum fishing might be allowed. Ronny went back home and I made a couple of further trips on my own. There was some chum fishing outside of Nitinat on the west coast of Vancouver Island that has recently been reopened. I came in with a reasonable catch of chums but it was a difficult fishery because the fish were just on the edge of the outside boundary. The Fisheries boat was out patrolling up and down while you were trying to fish inside the line, with fog and with the tide moving moving you around. One morning the James Sinclair, the biggest of the Fisheries vessels, loomed out of the fog, circled back and made me 'wrap' my net because I had inadvertently drifted across the boundary. That never leaves a good taste in your mouth.

Later on I went up into Bute Inlet. That was the last trip of the year for me and one of the more pleasant ones. When you get into Bute Inlet it's almost like fishing in a lake. It's beautiful scenery, with the mountains rising up on both sides. There's not very much tide running and you can take your time. I'd set the net out and let her drift and picked up better than three hundred chums in the couple of days I fished there. By then it was the twentieth of October and that became the end of the season for me.

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