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Article abstract

Co-operative forms of enterprise are often held up as a progressive, moderate alternative to the privations of the capitalist market economy. This paper considers the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op and its relations with organized labour in the north of British Columbia. The paper describes a contradiction within the co-op based on the possibilities of social ownership within a market economy. Through a discussion of the escalating labour conflicts between the co-op and its non-member employees the weaknesses of co-operative enterprises are revealed.

Us and Them: The Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op and Organized Labour, 1931-1989

Charles R. Menzies

LATE ONE EVENING, sometime in the early 1930s, a group of salmon trollers are said to have gathered around a galley table.[1] The boats were anchored and tied together in a small cove on the west coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Their day's work done, the men came together for a sociable conversation before retiring. Very quickly, their talk turned from stories of the day's fishing to more pressing economic concerns such as the price of fish and the monopoly-like control of the fishery by the big processors.[2] Despite good fishing, the companies' control of the

[1]The formal research upon which this paper was based was conducted during the fishing seasons of 1988, 1989, and 1990 while I worked as a commercial fisherman in Prince Rupert, BC. In subsequent years I have continued this research and have interviewed key Co-op fishers and management personnel as part of a larger historical-anthropological project concerning the Fishermen's Co-op. My academic interest in this topic was fueled by the stories I heard as a child and as a young adult working on the deck of a Co-op seine boat about the "Union" (United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union) and the "Dispute" of 1967. The dispute still lives in the memories of many "Rupertites." It was the proverbial tale of brother against brother and of families and friends who refused to talk for decades after. The little that has been written about the dispute — see, for example: A.V. Hill *Tides of Change: A Story of Fishermen's Co-operatives in British Columbia* (Prince Rupert 1967), or Wallace Clement, *The Struggle to Organize: Resistance in Canada's Fishery* (Toronto 1986) — remains locked in an either/or battle. That is, either the Co-op was wrong, or the Union was out to break the Co-op. I too have an opinion, but this paper is more about why Co-op members acted as they did, than about whether they were right or wrong. Both sides have overplayed their own innocence and the vileness of their opponent.

[2]Monopolistic capitalist firms have controlled British Columbia's fishing industry from inception to the mid-to late 1900s . See, for example, Wallace Clement, The *Struggle to*

Charles R. Menzies, "Us and Them: The Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op and Organized Labour, 1931-1989," *Labour/Le Travail*, 48 (Fall 2001), 89-108.

fish market meant that the fishermen gathered that evening were barely able to earn enough to get by. It is said that it was during this informal meeting that the idea of the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Cooperative Association (PRFCA) first took root.

For more than five decades, the PRFCA stood out as one possible path of resistance to the corporate agenda of private capital. From its early inception to its last days, members of the Fishermen's Co-op tenaciously fought for a co-operative alternative to the ravages of 20th-century capitalism. At its peak, the Co-op had a membership of over 3,000, ran or had initiated a co-operative food store, a ship chandlery, and a credit union. However, in the midst of the Co-op's economic success, it was ultimately unable to come to terms with the contradictory role played by organized labour within the confines of the co-operative institution.[3] In this paper I explore the building level of confrontation between the Co-op and organized labour from its inception in 1931 to its last decade of operation as a free standing, fisher-harvester owned co-operative.[4] The paper concludes by evaluating the progressive potential of the co-operative form of organization as a site of subaltern resistance.

The Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative

The Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative was incorporated in 1931 by a group of small trollers. These early co-operators were predominantly independent boat owners of Euro-Canadian origins. Their boats were rarely longer than 45 feet. Many of them combined salmon trolling with longline for halibut and/or cod. Their crews varied in size from one or two for trolling to three to five for longlining. Crew-members were typically recruited from amongst the skipper's male kin.

Their aim in forming a co-operative was to by-pass the local canning companies' control of the fishing industry and sell fish directly to fresh fish agents in the urban centres.[5] The early co-operators concentrated on developing a direct link between fishers and the fresh fish market rather than challenging "the existing sets of producer-processor relations of production."[6] The new Co-op succeeded in

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Organize; Patricia Marchak, Neil Guppy and John McMullan, eds., *Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish-Processing Industries in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1987), and Geoff Meggs, *Salmon: The Decline of the British Columbia Fishery* (Vancouver 1991).

[3]Elsewhere, I have discussed the role of resource pooling networks in the success of the Co-op in Menzies "All that Holds Us Together: Kinship and Resource Pooling in a Fishing Co-operative," *Maritime Anthropological Studies*, 6 (1993), 157-179, and conflicts between Euro-Canadian fishers and First Nations in Menzies, "Stories From Home: First Nations, Land Claims, and Euro-Canadians," *American Ethnologist*, 21 (1994), 776-791.

[4]With the noted exceptions of when I am explicitly referring to all-male groups of fishers, I employ the term fishers and fish-harvesters in place of the more common fisherman used by fishers themselves.

[5]A.V. Hill, *Tides of Change*, 68.

[6] Brian Hayward, "The Co-op Strategy," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 19 (1984), 54.

increasing its members' earning potential which in turn allowed them to reinvest in more efficient fishing technologies.

The formation of the Co-op was facilitated by the low capital investment required to enter the troll fishery and the flexible market potential of troll-caught salmon. Trollers' economic freedom was (and to a large extent remains) partly the result of a technological process that (unlike the net fishery) required a minimal investment in gear. Net fishers, however, were effectively tied to the private canneries by the high cost involved in replacing their linen seines and gillnets and through restrictive fishing license regulations.[7] The canneries offered easily accessible credit. In return, net fishers were contractually obligated to deliver all of their catch to the cannery.

The consistently higher quality product produced by trollers meant that troll caught fish could also be sold in the fresh fish market. However, the private fish processing firms were indifferent to the market potential of troll-caught salmon and chose instead to concentrate on canned fish.[8] The founders of the Co-op thus organized their resistance to private capital by taking advantage of the unrealized market potential of troll-caught salmon. They used their resource sharing networks of kin and close friends to establish a coalition of small boat owners who, together, could market their catch in the domestic, fresh fish market.[9]

Net fishers organized their resistance to the canneries in the form of union organization. These organizations remained small and ineffective trade-unions until the formation of the UFAWU in 1945 through a merger of several smaller unions. According to Vic Hill, the UFAWU's predecessor unions were handicapped by their scattered geographical location and their "collective individualism": "these groups were ... divided according to various gear used (salmon seiners, trollers, halibut men, herring seiners, etc.), and were split racially into Indian, Japanese, and Caucasian or 'white'.... In their union meetings, fishermen found it easier to fight each other than to look for concessions from companies."[10] With the establishment of the UFAWU, however, the collective individualism of these smaller unions was transformed into a strong, industrial union that has since pursued "a most aggressive strategy to establish a presence within the industry and protect its members."[11]

Essentially, the trollers were independent commodity producers; they owned their own means of production (the boat) and had a relative degree of control over the disbursement of their catch. Net fishers include disguised wage labourers (as in the case of gillnetters who were tied through means of debt bondage, licensing

[7]See, for example Diane Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto 1993).

[8]Hayward, "Co-op Strategy," 53.

[9]For an extended discussion on the importance of these networks of resource sharing, see Menzies "All that Holds Us Together."

[10]Hill, *Tides of Change*, 2.

[11]Clement, *The Struggle to Organize*, 92.

regulations, and rental agreements to the processing sector), wage labourers in the strict sense (non-owning crew members of the larger vessels), and capitalists (owners of the larger vessels, such as seiners, which employed three or more crew). The different strategies adopted by fishers to circumvent the control of monopolistic capital reflects the differences in their respective class characters.[12] Those fishers who lacked formal control over their labour power tended toward unionization. Those fishers, such as the independent trollers and longliners, who maintained some degree of control over the means of production, but lacked the power to confront the companies individually, opted for co-operative organizations.

During the 1930s and early 1940s, union members were primarily net fishers and Co-op members were predominantly trollers. Due to the nature of the market in fish and fish products, this resulted in net fishers and troll fishers selling their fish into different markets. Thus, fishers "delivering a troll-caught product for a non-canning market had little effect on the net fishers' efforts to create a scarcity of salmon for the processors" during a strike. Furthermore, whether a fisher was a member of a union or a member of a co-operative, they shared a similar economic position: "as a consequence, there was a common ideological focus in regard to their 'place' as fishermen vis-à-vis the companies."[13]

Despite this common location in relation to the companies, one should not, however, overlook the ideological implication of unionist versus co-operativist strategies.[14] The unionist strategy emphasizes the working-class character of fishers and has as its implicit goal the restructuring of capitalist society. The co-operativist strategy, however, emphasizes the business character of fishers. The Co-op organizer attempts to use the mechanisms of capitalism to improve the individual's material status. This political/ideological division between unionist and co-operator is the underlying factor that motivated many Co-op/Union conflicts. It is interesting to note that "Communist (Party) organizers [have] made the longest and most persistent effort to unionize the fishermen on an industry wide scale" and continued to play a leading role in the union's leadership until the Party's implosion in the post-Soviet period.[15] Early co-op organizers and activists, however, tended to be members of the CCF-NDP.

Initially, Co-ops and Unions co-existed in relative harmony. According to Vic Hill, during the formative years (1931-1945) "the co-ops were on good terms with

[12]In another paper, "On Permanent Strike: Class and Ideology in a Producers' Co-operative," *Studies in Political Economy*, 38 (1992), 85-108, I deal more explicitly with issues of class relations within the Co-op and the relevance of the concept of class in anthropological research.

[13]Hayward, "Co-op Srategy," 56.

[14]See Sharyn Kasmir, *The Myth of Mondragón: Cooperatives, Politics, and Working-Class Life in a Basque Town* (Albany 1996), 20-24.

[15] Percy Gladstone & Stuart Jamieson "Unionism in the Fishing Industry of British Columbia *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 16 (1950), 170.

the fishing unions.... For many years the PRFCA was the only Prince Rupert employer which recognized any fishermen's union."[16] Conflicts between the Co-op and the UFAWU did not break into the open until the Co-op shifted from acting as a brokerage agency for its members and, in the 1940s, began to process fish. The shift to processing immediately expanded the Co-op's shoreworkers and created a situation in which the Co-op was more vulnerable to strikes by shoreworkers who were organized by the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union.

Co-op/Union Conflicts, the Basis of the Confrontation

From the Co-op perspective there has never been a good reason to stop fishing during a UFAWU strike against the private companies:

> One of the reasons our fishermen had started their own co-operative business was to get away from the problem of recurring strikes over disputes between Fishermen's Unions and fishing Companies on the minimum price for fish. By going into business on their own, fishermen had actually declared permanent strike against those same companies.[17]

However, UFAWU activists argued that the Co-op's policy to continue fishing during union strikes weakened the union's bargaining position. According to George North, a one time UFAWU official, the union was "forced to beat a 'temporary organized retreat,' a decision influenced to some extent by the fact that the Co-op fleet was on the [fishing] grounds" during a 1946 trawl strike.[18]

By 1959, a little more than 25 years after the Co-op's formation, relations between the fishing industry's major union (UFAWU) and the Co-op "had deteriorated badly. Arguments over strikes or other union problems became an almost permanent situation."[19] In the period leading up to 1959, the Co-op had expanded from a small brokerage agent for trollers into a major fish processing firm employing more than 500 hundred workers.

The Co-op's growth was facilitated in 1941 by an agreement between Prince Rupert halibut fishers (the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union and the Prince Rupert Vessel Owners Association) and the Co-op to jointly construct a halibut liver plant.[20] The success of the liver plant was phenomenal. In 1945 the Co-op began

[16]Hill, *Tides of Change*, 78, 98.

[17]PRFCA, *Annual Report* (1956).

[18]George North, *A Ripple, A Wave: The Story of Union Organization in the B.C. Fishing Industry* (Vancouver 1974), 30.

[19]Hill, *Tides of Change*, 263. See also Ken Harding, *A Submission to the Board of Directors of the Co-operative Union of Canada and Representatives of the Canadian Labour Congress as Presented to a Meeting in Ottawa on October 15th, 1959* (in author's files). This submission documents the extent of Union/Co-op struggles troubling the Co-operative in the immediate post-World War II years.

[20]This amalgamation of forces between the DSFU, the vessel owners, and the Co-op has led to misunderstandings by some writers who appear to misinterpret this joint project and

construction of a new fish storage plant and ice making facilities and by 1947 "almost 100% of halibut livers landed in BC went through the Prince Rupert Co-op."[21] Membership rose to an all time high of 3290 in 1949.

The first open conflict between the Union and the Co-op in 1943 set the pattern for future conflicts between the two fishers' organizations. The Co-op had recently begun processing halibut and was building a new cold storage facility. Since an agreement had already been signed with the Co-op's shoreworkers earlier that spring, Co-op fishers did not anticipate a strike during the summer. However, when unorganized workers struck the private companies for a first contract, the Co-op Board of Directors claimed that the Union had improperly "required Co-op employees to break their contract and join the strike too. Co-op fishermen, infuriated at having their fishing so expensively interrupted, threatened to operate the plant themselves."[22] The matter was resolved after the private companies signed an agreement with the Union that was "less than what the Co-op was already paying."[23]

Co-op fishers fished through a UFAWU strike for the first time in 1952. Initially, the Co-op had adopted a policy of tying up for a few days at the start of a strike. "After that, on advice from the Co-op [Board of] Directors, its membership recommenced fishing."[24] Seven years later, this policy was firmly entrenched. Confronted with a UFAWU fish strike in 1959, Co-op fishers were ready. Despite complaints from the UFAWU to the Canadian Labour Congress and the Co-operative Union of Canada, the Fishermen's Co-op kept fishing with no intention of stopping. Co-op fishers felt they "had made a lot of progress. They themselves no longer needed to lose time and money over strikes.... [T]hey were in business for themselves and [had] given up the use of the strike as an effective weapon."[25]

During the 1960s and 70s the Co-op's economic development focused on expanding production. In 1961 a shrimp and crab cannery was built. This facility was expanded a few years later to can salmon as well. In 1965 a half million dollar fresh fish, ice, and processing plant was built in Vancouver. In the early 1970s the Co-op built an expanded cold storage facility and a modern trawl fish processing plant in Prince Rupert. Through 1978 to 1988 the Co-op's average annual produc-

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suggest that the DSFU members were not direct members of the Co-op. In point of fact, all crew members on the big boats and on most of the smaller boats were direct members of the Co-op with the same rights and privileges as other co-operators.

[21]Hill, *Tides of Change*, 102.

[22]Hill, *Tides of Change*, 98.

[23]According to Hill, *Tides of Change*, 99, the Co-op has always paid higher wages than have the companies. Several past members of the Co-op's Board of Directors backed up Hill's claim by directing the investigator to compare equivalent agreements between the companies and the UFAWU and the Co-op and its employees. In just about every case the Co-op paid its workers marginally more than a UFAWU member working for one of the other fish companies.

[24]Hill, *Tides of Change*, 112.

[25]Hill, *Tides of Change*, 264.

tion was 38 million pounds with annual gross sales of 67 million dollars.[26] It is not surprising, following five decades of continuous expansion, that the Co-op's "practices were looking increasingly less co-operative and more corporate."[27]

However, despite the many similarities between the Co-op and corporate fish processing plants the Co-op was different. Unlike the private companies Co-op fishers (boat owners *and* crew members) owned and controlled the operations of their fish plant. Co-op membership included all fishers irrespective of whether they were boat owners or not. To become a member, a fisher had to sign a marketing contract and agree to purchase a set number of shares of the co-op. The profit made on the sale of their fish was returned to the membership. A variety of provisions existed which made it possible for members to buy their shares over an extended period of time. While the share structure changed over the life of the Co-op, the basic principal of one member one vote was maintained. For a brief period during the 1940s, shoreworkers were also given an option of becoming Co-op members. However, the fishermen members were concerned that shoreworkers would "take over the Co-op" and by the end of the 1940s had reverted to a fishermen-only membership.

The democratic structure of the Co-op reflects yet another important difference between it and the private companies. The Co-op attempted to remain responsive to the interests of its membership through a system of elected regional boards and committees. Whereas most company fishers are employees of the company and have little if any say over company policy, Co-op fishers had a direct voice in shaping the policies of their association. Co-op fishers sold their fish to a plant that they owned.

While the Co-op's economic development was, for most of the post-war years, a picture of a steadily expanding and improving enterprise the Co-op's relationship with organized labour was the reverse. Contrary to the majority of sources which suggest that Co-op/Union conflicts are a product of the mid-to-late 1960s,[28] the Co-op and organized labour (as noted above) were in conflict since their formative years. Initial tensions were relatively insignificant, but as both organizations grew the animosity of the conflicts intensified, culminating in a major dispute in 1967.

The Dispute

In the late 1960s UFAWU organizers were attempting to expand the Union's jurisdiction to include all fishers on both coasts. In January of 1967 the union began an ill-fated organizing drive in the Maritimes which "ended in a seven month strike

[26]These figures are from the PRFCA 1988 annual report.

[27]Clement, *The Struggle to Organize,* 187. See also, Kasmir *The Myth of Mondragón*, for a discussion of how co-operatives tend toward anti-labour practices as a natural course of their evolution.

[28]See, for example: Clement, *The Struggle to Organize*; Hayward, "Co-Op Strategy"; and Marchak, Guppy, and McMullan, *Uncommon Property.*

in 1970 against Booth and Acadia Fisheries. The companies responded by closing the plants, declaring them uneconomical. The fishers lost an entire season, and the UFAWU was driven out of the area."[29]

In BC, the UFAWU began to organize crews working on longline and trawl vessels in 1966 and by early March of 1967 they believed they were in a position to call a strike for a trawl share-agreement with the vessel owners. The Union declared that all boats were to be in port by 17 March 1967. Most of the coastal trawl fleet honoured the strike deadline. In Prince Rupert, however, the Union met strong resistance. What began as a coast-wide tie-up by trawler crews turned into an ugly five-month struggle between the UFAWU and Co-op fishers.

In Prince Rupert, the local vessel owners association (PRVOA) refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the UFAWU deadline. Five Co-op boats (White Swan, Victor F, BC Mac, Zapora, and Northern Breeze) deliberately fished past the UFAWU deadline. According to the vessel owners' association their crews were represented by the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union[30] and thus, they were exempt form the UFAWU's edict. Vince Dixon, DSFU business agent, "contended that all members of the White Swan are members of the Deep Sea and 'to the best of my knowledge, the UFAWU does not have as members, crew-members on any of the vessels in question.'"[31] UFAWU shoreworkers at the Co-op, however, refused to unload the 250,000 pounds of fish on the five vessels and set up a picketline at the Co-op's Prince Rupert plant.

Though the dispute was sparked by the vessel owners' actions, it was initially a jurisdictional conflict between the Deep Sea and the UFAWU over who had the right to represent trawler crews on Co-op vessels. Once a powerful, coast-wide union, the DSFU had become the *de facto* Co-op fisher's union. The UFAWU claimed the DSFU was raiding its membership, while the DSFU argued that the UFAWU was intent on forcing the smaller union into a merger, in which Prince Rupert fishers would lose their autonomy. The issue of mergers, raids, and absorption of one

[29]Alicja Muszynski, "Shoreworkers and UFAWU Organization: Struggles between Fishers and Plant Workers within the Union," in Marchak, Guppy, and McMullan, eds., *Uncommon Property*, 280. See also, Homer Stevens and Rolf Knight, *Homer Stevens: A Life in Fishing* (Madeiva Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1992), 191-206, and on the 1967 dispute, 157-173.

[30]The DSFU was formed in 1914 from amongst halibut fishers from Washington State, British Columbia, and Alaska. In 1967 the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union (DSFU) was a remnant of a once powerful, coast-wide craft union. The only remaining local was in Prince Rupert. Most of the membership were fishing on Co-op boats and were linked by family and friendship ties to Co-op boat owners (for an extended discussion of the role of kinship in shaping the dynamics of the Co-op, see Menzies "All that Holds Us Together." To a certain extent, the DSFU acted as a way to keep more radical unions, such as the UFAWU, from representing Co-op fishers.

[31]*The Daily News*, 13 March 1967.

union's membership by the other dates back at least a decade before the 1967 dispute.[32]

The DSFU fought long and hard to maintain its independence. While other fishing unions on the coast were amalgamating, the DSFU steadfastly refused to merge. This fierce drive for independence from "external" forces stems from the strong kinship and economic ties that exist between co-op fishers, crew-members, and vessel owners alike.[33]

Prior to the 1967 dispute, the two unions' rights to represent fishers in the various fisheries had been clearly defined in an April 1959 agreement; the UFAWU represented net fishers; the Deep Sea represented longliners. As a result of this agreement, and given that most of the Co-op's large boat fleet engaged in net and longline fisheries, many Co-op crews belonged to both unions. However, neither union had a contract with the boat owners regulating the division of catch in the trawl fishery. Thus, the question of jurisdiction in the Co-op trawl sector was unresolved.

The initial dispute over unloading the five PRVOA boats was further complicated on 22 March 1967, by the rapid signing of a trawl agreement between the Deep Sea and the Vessel Owners. The Deep Sea justified the new agreement by pointing to a clause in their 1959 master agreement with the PRVOA that allowed for the negotiating of a trawl agreement at some unspecified future time. UFAWU officials reacted to the new agreement, signed just five days after UFAWU trawl crews struck, by calling the Deep Sea "an owner controlled union and the March 22 agreement a 'Sweetheart deal.'"[34] Vince Dixon, business agent for the DSFU, reiterated his union's right to represent Co-op fishers: "19 crew-members of the 30 involved approached him and asked that the Deep Sea negotiate the agreement. 'On March 22, the other 11 were not members of either organization, and if some of them had been members of the UFAWU at any time, they weren't paid up members then.'"[35]

On 23 March, the PRVOA was granted a Supreme Court injunction instructing Union members to unload the fish caught by the PRVOA vessels. The UFAWU, for its part, refused to budge: "'The Prince Rupert Vessel Owners are deliberately holding back until things get worse,' United Fishermen and Allied Worker Secretary-treasurer said.... 'The boats should have been unloaded with no spoilage to either the fish or damage to the boats.... The vessel owners figure the bigger the

[32]In a 1959 piece of correspondence between the DSFU and the CLC a DSFU official responds to a UFAWU accusation of raiding: "It might be possible that we are legally within our rights in this action [signing up UFAWU members] but it is the writer's opinion that morally we haven't a leg to stand on. ... We do not believe that we are in any position to go all the way down the line in a jurisdictional dispute with the U.F." [United Fishermen's and Allied Workers' Union].

[33]See Menzies, "All That Holds Us Together," for an expanded discussion.

[34]*The Daily News*, 28 March 1967.

[35]*The Daily News*, 28 March 1967.

mess, the more solid their claim'."[36] The Union reaffirmed its stance in a coast-wide ballot on April 3, which "forbade the sending of a UFAWU telegram ordering Prince Rupert shoreworkers to handle 'unfair' vessels" and, on 6 April, the Trawl Strike Committee declared the 28 member vessels of the PRVOA "unfair."[37] To end the dispute, UFAWU officials said that all the PRVOA had to do was to recognize the UFAWU's jurisdictional claim to represent trawl crews: "It is just as simple as that," Ted Foort, northern representative of the union said.[38] Simple though it may have been according to UFAWU officials, neither the skippers who owned the boats in question, nor their crews, were willing to accede to the UFAWU demands.

As the fish rotted in the holds, lines of conflict became accentuated. The local newspaper's editorials condemned the UFAWU for being more interested in power than in the conditions of workers. Peter Lester, the Mayor of Prince Rupert, proclaimed that the UFAWU had badly mishandled the situation. "We," he said, "and I speak for all people here, live by the sea and we do not welcome tin pot dictatorial diatribes, with not one iota of common sense."[39] Rev. Dr. Elliot, of the United Church of Canada, publicly criticized the UFAWU's action: "Man has only one freedom, the freedom of choice," said Rev. Elliot. "Now we have a giant union trying to take that freedom away from the fishermen of this community."[40]

Other voices, however, spoke out in support of the UFAWU. The local Labour Council, the mill workers' union, and the longshoremen's union published statements and provided financial support. In the letters to the editor section of *The Daily News*, one UFAWU supporter argued: "the UFAWU is now, as in the past, taking the long range view of the issues at stake, by endeavouring to protect the economical (sic) standards of its own members."[41] Another writer warned, "the slow but surely increasing influence of the big boat owners in the Co-op and the Credit Union, is ominous.... The real purpose of co-operatives — improving the lot of fishermen who were being gouged by various companies for company profit — appears to have been lost and instead these organizations are being misused."[42]

In the midst of this war of words, Co-op boat owners and crew-members defied UFAWU pickets on 13 April 1967 "to board five trawl vessels, loaded with rotten fish, and sail them to dumping grounds... A total of 45 men from both organizations agreed to take part in getting rid of the fish that (had) been rotting in the holds of the vessels since March 21."[43] When the boats returned from dumping the rotten fish the "crews and owners were approached by UFAWU pickets. Words were

[36] *The Daily News*, 30 March 1967.
[37] Muszynski "Shoreworkers and UFAWU Organization," 280.
[38] *The Daily News*, 31 March 1967.
[39] *The Daily News*, 14 April 1967.
[40] *The Daily News*, 4 April 1967.
[41] *The Daily News*, 19 April 1967.
[42] *The Daily News*, 20 April 1967.
[43] *The Daily News*, 13 April 1967.

exchanged, fists flew, and a call went out to police."[44] No charges were laid. After unloading the rotten fish, Deep Sea Union members and their skippers spent their time preparing for the 9 May halibut season opening.

The relative calm was shattered 1 May 1967, when workers at the Co-op honoured the UFAWA hot edict and refused to load ice and bait on five PRVOA boats, White Swan, Pacific Rover, Pacific Belle, Sun Fjord, and Silver Bounty. Since the PRVOA boats were operated by "Deep Sea Fishermen's Union members, with whom [the owners] have a legal operating agreement"[45] neither skippers nor crews saw any reason why they should not receive ice and bait. "'We are applying for ice and bait as we normally do when our boats are ready to leave for halibut grounds,' Foster Husoy, skipper of the Sun Fjord and president of the PRVOA said. 'We have advised our lawyers to seek an injunction to order the shoreworkers to load ice and bait.'"[46] The vessel owners threatened to seek damages for lost fishing time for every boat refused ice and bait: "even with only part of the fleet listed so far, it is a very impressive sum," Foster Husoy said.[47]

Representatives from the UFAWU and Deep Sea met several times during this period in an attempt to work out a solution. However, on 7 May 1967, DSFU representatives walked out of a joint meeting. "'The UFAWU hasn't granted one concession since the talks began two weeks ago,' DSFU representative Vince Dixon said ... 'The only agreement offered means a complete destruction of the DSFU.... [The UFAWU] say nothing will be signed until a merger agreement is signed. A merger would mean UFAWU would swallow the DSFU with one gulp.'"[48] DSFU members were not willing to give up their autonomy in a merger with "a southern-dominated union whose executives always insist on coast-wide voting to the detriment of the north."[49]

Prince Rupert's longline fleet remained tied to the dock on 9 May1967, the opening day of the halibut season. Twenty-eight PRVOA boats had been refused ice and bait by UFAWU shoreworkers since 1 May 1967. The UFAWU's "unfair" label affected 30 skippers and 137 crew members (of whom 127 belonged to the DSFU). According to Vince Dixon at least 20 disaffected UFAWU longliners had "joined DSFU since the dispute started."[50]

The PRVOA won a second injunction against the UFAWU on 12 May 1967. This injunction banned "workers from refusing to 'carry out lawful requirements of their employers' in supplying ice and bait to the boats."[51] The twenty-eight PRVOA boats labeled "unfair" by the UFAWU, and subsequently refused ice and bait, made clear

[44] *The Daily News*, 14 April 1967.
[45] *The Daily News*, 1 May 1967.
[46] *The Daily News*, 2 May 1967.
[47] *The Daily News*, 3 May 1967.
[48] *The Daily News*, 8 May 1967.
[49] *The Daily News*, 10 May 1967.
[50] *The Daily News*, 9 May 1967.
[51] *The Daily News*, 12 May 1967.

their intention to again request ice and bait. A UFAWU member, who had earlier expressed dissatisfaction with the union, "said he would be on hand when his skipper, Tom Pallant, owner of the Silver Bounty, applied [for ice and bait] again. He said most crew members of the other boats would likely be on hand."[52]

Three days later the dispute appeared over. UFAWU crews, having been served the injunction, were loading ice and bait on PRVOA boats at the Co-op early Monday, 15 May 1967. However, following a meeting of nearly 200 UFAWU members that evening, shoreworkers voted to refuse ice and bait to PRVOA boats. The next morning Co-op fishers were greeted by a mass UFAWU picket.

A flag waving counter demonstration of forty women (wives, daughters, and supporters of DSFU and PRVOA members) greeted union picketers on Wednesday, 17 May. Many of the placards were explicitly anti-communist and urged the UFAWU picketers to "Get rid of communist leaders" and "Protect our democracy — get rid of reds." According to a report in *The Daily News*:

> A spokeswomen for the group said they gathered in protest against [the actions of the] UFAWU leaders in not allowing shoreworkers to bait and ice vessels for fishing even though they were ordered to by injunctions ... One women approached [Homer] Stevens and screamed: 'You should be shot.' ... A spokeswomen for the group said they would set up a picketline at the UFAWU offices ... and would likely picket 'until we're blue in the face.'[53]

The "Marching Mothers," as the group came to be called, maintained their counter pickets until mid July. Marches became a daily event and at the height of the action more than 100 women participated.[54]

Skirmishes over loading ice and bait continued to hold PRVOA halibut boats in port without ice or bait. However, on 19 May 1967, the DSFU and PRVOA issued a joint statement announcing that PRVOA boats with DSFU crews planned to begin leaving for the fishing grounds:

> In reaching the decision to go fishing at this time, the two groups intend to obtain ice and bait through whatever channels are available to them. It is their hope that the fish which they catch can be handled in Prince Rupert in normal fashion, but if this proves to be impossible because of the UFAWU refusal to honour the injunction obtained by the Vessel Owners, then the fish will be landed in foreign ports.[55]

[52]*The Daily News*, 12 May 1967.
[53]*The Daily News*, 17 May 1967.
[54]In addition to the marches, these women circulated a petition requesting government intervention in the dispute. The petition read: "The undersigned are seriously concerned about the flagrant violations of the law of the province. We request the government to intervene and end the fishing tie-up," *The Daily News*, 18 May 1967. Six-thousand signatures were collected before the petition was finally sent to the provincial government.
[55]*The Daily News*, 19 May 1967.

Within a week, only five PRVOA boats had not received ice and bait. The other PRVOA boats were off to the fishing grounds.

Three months after triggering the dispute between the DSFU, PRVOA, and the UFAWU, Viggio Mark, owner-skipper of the White Swan, landed at the Co-op plant with a load of trawl fish on Friday, 19 May 1967. "We're not going to stop fishing," Mark said. "If the shoreworkers won't unload the fish, I'll tie-up to the dock and give it all away." When the shoreworkers refused to unload the White Swan, the boat was moved to the floats and some fish was given away.

Saturday morning was different. Shoreworkers at the Co-op defied their own union's policies and began unloading the White Swan. For the first time since the dispute began "Co-op officials ... ordered workers home for refusing to work on boats termed 'hot' by UFAWU."[56] By 26 May when the first PRVOA boat returned from the halibut grounds, Norman Bellis, Co-op production manager, declared: "Everything is fair from now on.... From now on we intend to handle all the fish our boats bring in."[57] The UFAWU tried in vain to hold on to the Co-op's Prince Rupert plant by declaring it "hot" on 2 June. But most of the plants' 146 workers crossed the UFAWU's picket line and went to work. For all intents and purposes the UFAWU's strike was broken at this point.

Throughout June and July the DSFU and the PRVOA held firm in their position that the UFAWU had no right to represent Co-op fishers on the longline and trawl vessels. Co-op fishers were now able to fish with only minor inconveniences since the UFAWU was no longer able to exert any influence over the workers at the Co-op's Prince Rupert plant. Workers who continued to cross UFAWU picketlines began to organize a decertification bid in late June.

Faced with the threat of decertification and pressure from the Canadian Labour Congress, the UFAWU representatives met with the DSFU in an attempt to resolve the two union's jurisdictional dispute. While DSFU/UFAWU discussions were continuing, the UFAWU settled its dispute with trawlers operating out of Vancouver and Victoria on 13 July 1967. A week later, DSFU and UFAWU representatives agreed to bring a fourteen point memorandum, designed to resolve the dispute, before their respective memberships. The three major points of the memorandum were: 1) all boats delivering to the Co-op would clear through the DSFU, but PRVOA boats selling outside the Co-op would be covered under UFAWU agreements; 2) the PRVOA must drop all legal actions, and; 3) all UFAWU members dismissed by the Co-op be reinstated with full seniority.

The UFAWU approved the memorandum on 25 July 1967. However, despite having signed a memorandum of understanding, the DSFU membership unanimously rejected the agreement. The UFAWU unilaterally declared the strike over on 3 August 1967. For the 40 Co-op workers who had honoured the UFAWU picketline, however, the abrupt ending of the strike worked to their disadvantage. Co-op

[56]*The Daily News*, 23 May 1967.
[57]*The Daily News*, 26 May 1967.

officials refused to rehire them. The Co-op's "board of directors felt the dispute was illegal, and therefore would not rehire the 22 men and 18 women involved [in refusing] ... to cross UFAWU pickets early in the four month old dispute."[58]

The 1967 dispute was the manifestation of Co-op fishers' worst fears. Co-op fishers active during the 1967 dispute maintain that the UFAWU had always tried to destroy the Co-op: "the UFAWU wanted us to hate our skippers. They didn't understand how we could be friends with the boat owner. The Union would do anything to break the Co-op." Some of these men went further, and suggested that the UFAWU even conspired with the companies in the hopes of destroying the Co-op. While the actual intentions of the UFAWU leadership in the period leading up to the 1967 dispute will most likely never be known, their actions were interpreted by Co-op fishers as a direct attack on the Co-op and, specifically, the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union.

Certainly Co-op members saw the 1967 dispute as an attempt by the UFAWU to destroy their Co-op: "The so-called fisheries dispute is not a dispute at all but a planned attack by the United Fishermen's and Allied Workers' Union to raid the membership of the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union and capture the security of the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative Association."[59] The Union leadership argued that the 1967 dispute signaled the take over of the Co-op by the capitalist big boat skippers.[60] Notwithstanding the veracity of the respective accounts, 1967 was the peak year of UFAWU/Co-op conflicts.

At the conclusion of the 1967 dispute the relationship between the UFAWU and the Co-op had been fundamentally changed. The UFAWU's Co-op shoreworker section was decertified. All Co-op fishers were represented by the DSFU. Two of the UFAWU's leaders received jail terms for their part in the dispute and the Union was fined $25,000 for counseling its members to disobey the 23 March 1967 court injunction.

Fishing with abandon

In the two decades following the UFAWU's defeat, the tenor of labour conflicts within the PRFCA was altered. Moving from their victory over the UFAWU, the Co-op proceeded to demand a string of concessionary agreements from their new, in-house union, the Prince Rupert Amalgamated Shoreworkers and Clerks Union (PRASCU). However, the change of union did not solve the inherent contradictions of co-op/union labour relations. And, following an initial period of quiescence, the Co-op faced two bitter conflicts in the 1970s (one a strike, the other a lockout) and then, toward the end of the Co-ops' life, PRASCU struck over contracting out and working conditions in 1989.

[58] *The Daily News*, 12 July 1967.

[59] Letter to the editor, *The Daily News*, 26 May 1967.

[60] For a detailed account of UFAWU's "Big-boat take-over" thesis, see Clement *The Struggle to Organize*, especially 102-3.

In between the 1967 dispute and the strike of 1989 the world market in salmon, the Co-op's major product, underwent a major shift from a predominantly European-based canned fish market to a Japanese, fresh fish market. At the same time, the world production of farmed salmon rapidly increased until, by the late 1980s, there was as much farmed salmon on the market as wild salmon. Taken together, these two changes resulted in a depression in the price of salmon. Also, during this period the Co-op experimented with a variety of new business ventures, which included a fish processing plant in the eastern US, a factory trawler in BC, a fish farm, a fish food processing plant in Naniamo, and a new drag filleting plant in Prince Rupert. Much of this expansion occurred in the context of the inflationary herring roe fisheries of the 1970s. The lasting economic impact of the Co-op's growing debt contributed to the loss of membership and increasingly bellicose labour practices. By the end of the Co-op's existence, its plant workers were tired of being on the receiving end of a series of give-away contracts.

On 21 July 1989 British Columbia's fishing industry was effectively brought to a halt when the UFAWU struck the Fish Processors Bargaining Association over fish prices, wages, and benefits. This was the first major industry wide strike since 1982. On 29 July, PRASCU shut down the Co-op's Prince Rupert plant in the Co-op's first major labour stoppage of the decade.[61]

Co-op fishers greeted the UFAWU strike with a degree of restrained glee, for, in the absence of UFAWU crewed boats, the fishing grounds were practically empty. For example, during the first week of the UFAWU strike, in an area just north of Prince Rupert which normally supported a fleet of 150-200 seine boats and 350-400 gillnetters, only about 30 seiners and 40 gillnetters were fishing (and these were predominantly Co-op boats). The UFAWU strike had no direct or immediate impact on the Co-op in terms of limiting Co-op fishers' ability to fish; if anything, the Co-op's catching potential increased in the absence of the UFAWU fleet. The Co-op's seine fleet reacted to the UFAWU strike by quickly organizing a pool to co-ordinate catching effort and maximize the fleet's overall production. The pool was a temporary phenomenon which was quickly disbanded at the conclusion of the UFAWU strike.

Unlike news of the UFAWU's conflict with the major fish processing firms, the PRASCU strike did not arouse any feelings of glee. At a sequence of information meetings organized by the Co-op immediately prior to PRASCU's strike (during the last week of July, 1989), management personal told Co-op fishers:

> We're not interested in playing games. We've told the shoreworkers that prices are falling and if we can't pay the fishermen a good price, they'll leave. You guys know that it all comes out of the dockside price. We've costed out their demands and it will add another 1.6 million dollars to our labour bill. The money just isn't there.[62]

[61]This account of events is taken from my field notes during the summer of 1989 and from interviews with Co-op fishers and plant workers during and after the events described.
[62]From field notes, 21 July 1989, 157.

Co-op members were warned to hold their tempers:

Now is not the time to bitch at the workers. But if any of you have any contacts in the plant tell them the money just isn't there. If we all pull together, we can get through the tough weather.[63]

They were told that, were it not for "outside influences" a conflict could have been averted:

A couple of the members of the Union's [negotiating] committee have got themselves wired in with the UFAWU — the more militant section there. — They'd [UFAWU] like to see them [PRASCU] join in their struggle. The UFAWU would like to see us shut down. You know how they're always eager to shut down the Co-op.[64]

The days immediately prior to the PRASCU strike were particularity chaotic. Most of the time was spent fishing, trying to catch as much as possible before the impending PRASCU strike became a reality. On 27 July 1989, the pool coordinator said: "Go out and load up, if we're going to be shut down, then we might as well load up on everything we can." The shoreworkers had rejected the Co-op's final offer by a margin of 82 per cent. Their strike deadline was set for 3 pm Saturday, 29 July 1989.[65] On Saturday the fleet sat at the dock loaded. There was no change in the labour conflict. Some of the fishers were angry. They called the approaching shoreworker strike greedy and stupid. Others accused the UFAWU of manipulating the Co-op shoreworkers into an unnecessary strike. More cynical fishers pointed out that while they were tied up and being prevented from fishing the shoreworkers would work throughout the strike until the fish presently being unloading was processed.

The PRASCU strike ended Tuesday, 1 August 1989 after the union membership ratified a tentative agreement reached in the early hours of the morning. "Wages and revised language, particularity in sections dealing with sexual harassment, [were] the key points of the tentative one-year agreement.... The contract package calls for an across-the-board increase of 40 cents an hour for most employees."[66]

The UFAWU strike continued until 7 August 1989. The Union prevented the introduction of major concessions, but was unable to achieve any real improvements; the status quo was maintained. Due to a quirk in Union negotiations, UFAWU fishers settled several days ahead of union shoreworkers and tendermen and were permitted by their Union leadership to go fishing.[67] In Prince Rupert this resulted

[63]From field notes, 21 July 1989, 157.
[64]From field notes, 25 July 1989, 163.
[65]From field notes 'B,' 27 July 27, 14-15.
[66]*The Daily News*, 1 August 1989.
[67]Each section of the UFAWU bargains separately with the fish processors. In the past it has not been unusual for the different sections to conclude agreements at different times.

in Union fishers bringing in loads of fish which then sat at the dock and rotted as their fellow union shoreworkers refused to unload the fish. In the Co-op the seine pool continued until 10 August.

Conclusion

The conflicts of 1952, 1959, and 1967 intensified the animosity between the UFAWU and the Co-op. The increasing level of conflict between these institutions underlined the fundamentally antagonistic class interests they represented. After having successfully pushed the UFAWU out of the Prince Rupert plant in 1967, co-operators might be forgiven for believing that they had resolved the fundamental contradiction between capital and labour. However, as the events of the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated, the issue of labour (or, more precisely, the question of class and class struggle) remained at the heart of the Co-op's difficulties. While it may be argued that the Co-op's labour history affirms the big-boat takeover thesis, something far more crucial was at stake in terms of evaluating the progressive potential of co-operative forms of production.

In the post-Soviet era, market-based solutions are advocated as the only way forward by left and right alike. While commentators may disagree over how far one should go, the questions of whether or not one should go is rarely given serious attention. However, the example of the fishermen's Co-op and its relationship to working people raises crucial questions about the possibility of finding equitable solutions to the ravages of private capitalism within a market-based economy. The Co-op's ongoing labour strife points to a fundamental contradiction between the possibility of social ownership and a market economy.

As long as the Co-op persisted as a marginal player within the fishing industry and restricted its activities to selling members' fish, it could and did avoid conflicts with organized labour. However, at the moment the Co-op changed from marketing to processing, it was forced to confront the inherent contradiction of trying to simultaneously act in the interests of one segment of the subaltern (small boat owners) and necessarily having to suppress the interests of a second segment (shoreworkers and, to a lesser extent, deckhands). Up until the economic crises of the 1980s, the interests of deckhands were subsumed within the category of

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What was unusual in 1989 was that the Union leadership permitted the fishers to end their strike and go fishing while the other two sections of the Union were without an agreement. That this occurred is, I think, partly an outcome of the Union's weakening stance within the industry. The Native Brotherhood, which represents status Indian fishers and normally co-operates with the UFAWU in negotiations, signed an agreement with the Fish Processors on 30 July 1989. Also, the non-union section of the fishing fleet has significantly expanded since the late 1970s. In light of these intervening factors the UFAWU may have had a difficult time preventing union fishers from fishing once they concluded their agreement, irrespective of what was happening with the shoreworkers and tendermen.

"members." But, except for a brief moment in the early 1940s, shoreworkers were always excluded from membership.

Meeting the needs and aspirations of the shoreworkers ultimately stood in the way of the Co-op's economic viability. That this was so was not as noticeable during the exceptional period of growth in the capitalist world economy after World War II. In the context of generalized growth, the Co-op could afford to pay its workforce a slightly better rate than the social average. At the point when the world capitalist economy began to contract in the early 1970s, the Co-op was forced to either rationalize its operation (holding down wages and fish prices and increasing management privileges such as contracting out to non-union work sites) or face the prospect of bankruptcy.[68] This was, and remains, the limit to the progressive potential of co-operative forms of organizing production.

For the PRFCA, economic and management upheavals during the late 1980s and early 1990s led to the dissolution of the Co-op. Despite having survived the crisis period of high interest rates and low fish prices during the late 1970s and early 1980s, a crisis which caused the financial collapse of many of the medium scale private companies, the Co-op was unable to maintain its position in a fishing industry constantly beset by regulatory, ecological, and economic crisis. The strength of the Co-op had resided in the support of a core group of members who owned their own fishing vessels. However, the continued retreat of the UFAWU throughout the 1980s (which led to lower fish prices for all fishers) plus a fundamental change in the structure of the international market for fish and fish products, combined with government regulations aimed at forcing small scale fishers out of the BC fishery, ultimately destroyed the core membership base of the Co-op.

In a sequence of emergency meetings during the fall of 1989 the Co-op's membership was asked to approve a series of cost-saving measures designed to save the Co-op. But, it was too little too late and in 1991 the Co-op membership voted to end its half century of operation as a producer's co-operative. The road to the Co-op's collapse is littered with accusations of mismanagement and vested interests. Underlying it all, however, was the simple reality that the Co-op was unable to make the complete transition from co-operative enterprise to capitalist firm and, in the midst of the 1980s economic crisis, lacked the flexibility of a fully capitalist firm to do what was "necessary" in terms of rationalization, cost cutting, and taking the turn into the neo-liberal market-place. When all was said and done, the vestiges of the Co-op's early workerist ideology left only one option available: privatization.

Ultimately, co-ops must respond to the inherent laws of accumulation under capitalism. At particular points in a co-op's history it may be possible, due to ideological commitment or favourable economic conditions, to ignore or override

[68]See, for example, Paul Knox and John Agnew, *The Geography of the World Economy* (New York 1998), 188-219.

this economic imperative. However, the laws of the market-place inevitably intervene and, as the history of the Fishermen's Co-op suggests, a Co-op either becomes a fully developed capitalist firm or collapses.

From left to right: Co-op fishermen Gordon Nicholls, Rodney Pierce, Sid Dickens Jr., and skipper/owner Basso Menzies working on the bow of Menzies's halibut longliner/salmon seiner the Ala Wai II, Prince Rupert BC, 1967. Picture first appeared in the *Prince Rupert Daily News*.

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