

Excerpts from:

***INDIANS AT WORK: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia 1858-1930*, by Eryn Holbrook (SFU, 2004)**

In 1906... Indian longshoremen of the Burrard Inlet area were central in forming the Lumberhandlers Industrial Union, Local 526 of the Industrial Workers of the World. Indian lumberhandlers participated in virtually all the union struggles of the Vancouver waterfront, some as union members but others as strike breakers. Squamish members were central in founding the International Longshoremen's Association in 1912, and were part of the bitter Vancouver dock strikes in 1923 and 1935. Some later helped establish the first Canadian local of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union.

In 1906 Chief Joe Capilano, a member of the Squamish Burrard Inlet band and a longshoreman on the North Shore lumber docks, took his savings and travelled to London. He managed to get an audience with the same King of England and put before him an appeal for Indian rights and land claims in BC. Capilano returned to the Vancouver docks, the King to his counting house, and the Vancouver press occasionally refloated the story on the days when there was little copy. There the matter seemed to rest. Except that Capilano's trip was part of an upwelling of Indian claims that were gathering steam. A few years later, far north on the Nass, the Nishga Land Movement would refer to Capilano's trip.

... Export sawmills arose in the Crofton-Chemainus and the Burrard Inlet areas during the 1860s. Indian labour was employed both in the mills and in longshoring lumber into sailing vessels, which were then the primary means of transporting timber long distances.

...Export lumber mills on Burrard Inlet had become a major industry by the 1870s and local Indian labour made up part of the work force. In 1873 one Squamish man had allegedly amassed some \$3000 mainly through sawmill work, which he reportedly used in a competition for chiefly status against another Indian sawmill worker. By the mid-1870s a complement of Indian sawmill workers and stevedores existed at the Moodyville and Hastings sawmills on Burrard Inlet. Others worked in logging camps or as hand loggers around the southern coasts. Sawmill and lumber handling jobs already were an established source of cash income to Squamish bands on Burrard Inlet by 1878.

... While sawmill work entailed unskilled labour a good deal of practical experience was required and acquired. Some Indian men already held clearly skilled jobs. One Dick Issacs, a Squamish man from a North Vancouver reserve, had been a sawyer at Hastings Sawmill before he was crippled in a work accident in 1886. Jim Franks and Alex Tom, two other Squamish men, operated the log carriage at Hastings Mill in the mid-1880s. A core of Indian sawmill workers had worked many years in the Moodyville mill during the previous decade. According to Calvert Simson, then storekeeper at Hastings Sawmill, trade was often in company script and Chinook jargon was a common means of communication in and around the mill during the mid 1880s.

... During the 1890s the Sessional Papers of the DIA list the Squamish group living near the mill as the 'Hastings Sawmill Band.'...

...Longshoring as a regular source of income developed from the employment of Indian workers in the export sawmills. Until the 1890s such sawmills were exclusively coastal and lumber was shipped aboard lumber barques, and later steamers, destined mainly for Pacific Rim markets. Sawmill production fluctuated considerably and often the same crews which produced the lumber

were used to load it into ships. From the 1870s to the 1930s Indian longshoremen were primarily involved in lumber loading.

...Reminiscing about the time he was manager of the Victoria Door and Lumber Company mill at Chemainus in 1919, H.R. MacMillan himself enthused about the hard working qualities of the Indian longshore gangs. They apparently were called in for specific jobs from their home reserves and worked under their own bosses. They managed to load and turn around lumber ships in record time.

...The sawmills and docks of Burrard Inlet gradually became the most important locale for Indian longshoremen. Members of local Squamish bands were already working in the Burrard Inlet sawmills by the end of the 1860s and longshoring is listed as one of the primary sources of their income in the 1876 Department of Indian Affairs report. Moody's Mill, in North Vancouver, was a major employer of Indian labour and by 1870 and a heterogeneous 'community' of sawmill workers and longshoremen was growing up nearby.

By 1890 a plethora of mills had emerged around Burrard Inlet and on False Creek. Many hired Indian workers and a core of Indian longshoremen had begun to develop. By the end of that decade a number of Indian foremen and other longshore specialists, such as 'side runners', 'hatch tenders', 'donkeymen', already existed on the Burrard docks.

A linkage between leadership of Squamish bands in North Vancouver and employment on the docks seems to have developed. For instance, Dan Paul (the father of Andrew Paul, a notable Indian spokesman of the following generation) was both a 'watchman' in the Squamish mission hierarchy and a permanent mill worker and longshoreman during the 1890s. By 1896 he was the superintendent of lumber loading gangs for a stevedoring company briefly operated by Captain Cates. Chief Joe Capilano also worked as a foreman on the Vancouver docks during the same period. This helped finance his trip to England in 1906 where he laid forth Indian land claims in an audience with a King of England.

Vancouver dock workers were a heterogeneous lot by the late 1890s. They included Chileans, Kanakas (Hawaiians), native Indians, native whites, assorted Europeans, and others such as John St. John, a Barbadian who for forty years was active in supporting whatever labour unions there were on the docks. Squamish longshoremen were part of this cosmopolitan bunch, although often they worked in separate gangs. Usually they loaded the same kinds of ships and did the same kinds of tasks as other longshoremen did. By the turn of the century they drank together, argued, combined and competed with each other, and began to organize labour unions.

Alex Nyman, who grew up near Moodyville near the North Vancouver docks, remembered longshoring near the turn of the century. The Indian longshore crews around Burrard Inlet numbered fifty to sixty men. They specialized in longshoring lumber. Nyman began working on the docks in 1903. As a kid of not quite fourteen he was desperate to get away from doing chores on his family's farmlet on the not so distant outskirts of Vancouver. Remembering his first step into adulthood,

Believe it or not, my first boss was Chief Joe Capilano. Leon was in charge of the works. Leon Nahu. They were working night shifts to get the ship out; it had to be finished by the first of the year so they put on night crews. They got men from everywhere and they had to put a night foreman on. The whole job was too big for Joe so they put Joe on the after end only and they had another fellow up forward. Leon used to stay from seven o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock at night, to oversee the whole job. Chief Joe came along

and said, 'Say boy, would you like to go to work' and I said, 'Sure.' I would do anything if I could get away from that milk ranch.

Something of the ingenuity and the pride of work involved in lumber longshoring in those days is captured in an account by Ed Nahanee, one of the second generation of Indian longshoremen on the inlet. While probably an overly rosy reminiscence, Nahanee suggests a certain camaraderie among dock workers. He began work on the waterfront in circa 1912, at the age of fifteen or sixteen. His father had previously worked for many years for Empire Stevedoring as a steam winch operator. Ed tells of longshoring roughly during the era of WW1.

One of the wire puller's jobs was to guide the load to the chute. You had a peavy and would give it a pinch here and a pinch there. When the load was moving it was easy to handle. We would have about 500 feet of wire. You had to have strong legs.

When you started to load a sailing ship, right down at the bottom there was about six feet of rock ballast. The siderunner would look at the rock and it would be uneven and he had to see that it was leveled out by stowing a bit here and a bit there and a bit this way and a bit that way. The ship might be 400 feet and once the bottom was leveled you floored off. We could stow about a million and a half feet in a ship that size. It took a hell of a big ship to take over two million. There were a few steam ships coming in at this time. But there were an awful lot of sailing ships.

On those sailing ships we would have four men a side down below. Two wire pullers, a donkey driver and four men on the dock. The four men on the dock made up the loads. We used to work 10 hours a day. No overtime. We got 45 cents an hour. That was in 1912.

...It would take about six weeks to load one of those ships. That would be working six days a week . . . The guys were all characters on the beach. They all fitted into a picture of fun. It made a real nice, lively day. When you went home, you went feeling good. The next morning you were all there again. That was the spirit in those days. If I had to do it over again I would do the same thing. I don't care how dirty the job was, I had the strength and I had the brains. St. John used to say we were all one big family. A part of each other.

A comparison of wages in those days. We were getting 45 cents an hour. A man working in a sawmill got 40 cents. Around 1918 we went on strike for 5 cents an hour more. I think that there was a small strike in 1915. That was when we started to amalgamate with the cargo handlers.

We belonged to the Bow and Arrows. I was secretary-treasurer the same time as Andy Paul was business agent. I was only there as secretary for about six months and then I went bossing. This was around 1923 or 1924.

Indian longshoremen acquired a reputation as lumber loaders. Both they and their employers recounted tales of the skill, stamina, and knack of Indian longshore crews in this work. Tales of how Indian crews working day and night got the ships out in time, stories in which Indian longshoremen had to be sent in to take over difficult jobs which other longshore gangs could not handle, and so forth.

...[A]ccounts from the first half of the twentieth century can be found in the I.L.W.U.s *Man along the Shore*. Woven through the pages of this set of accounts are reminiscences of and by Indian longshoremen - William and Ed Nahanee, Jack Fisher, Gus Band, Joe Capilano, Dan Paul,

Leon and Jumbo Nahu, Ambrose Reid, Louis Miranda, and a dozen others. In the overarching context of work they allude to both the camaraderie among dockworkers from disparate backgrounds but also of the divisions and sometime defeats they experienced. The role of Indian longshoremen in the formation of labour unions deserves a brief mention.

...According to Stuart Philpott's account of Squamish longshoremen, '[I]n 1906 the Lumber Handlers Union, No. 526, of the Industrial Workers of the World, began, composed largely of Indians. Meetings were held in a hall on the reserve.'

The majority of the fifty to sixty members of the IWW local were Indian lumber loaders from North Vancouver but it was not an exclusive ethnic organization. According to Ed Long, the core members of this union included Englishmen, Hawaiians, and others. One of the founders was John St. John, a black man from Barbados who had already had a career as a seaman, boxing promoter, sealer, and longshoreman among the Chemainus lumber gangs. It was he who designed the crest of the North Vancouver lumberhandlers who during the next fifty years (under various designations) were colloquially known as the 'Bows and Arrows'.

The IWW local appears to have foundered after 1908. But by 1911 and 1912 Indian longshoremen were again in the thick of organizing. Louis Miranda, one of the Indian longshore leaders, was instrumental in having them affiliate with the International Longshoremen's Association.

... on July 12, 1913, a second ILA charter was issued to form Local 38-57, apparently composed mainly of lumber handling Indians. The local's first president was Squamish Band member William Nahanee. The executive also had some White members over the next few years although Ed Nahanee, son of the first president and present [1963] business agent for the Native Brotherhood of BC, was vice president of the local in 1915.

...The Vancouver locals of the ILA were smashed during the bitter 1923 dock strike, which was orchestrated by the Shipping Federation (one of the most sinister employers' organizations ever to exist in Canada). Local and imported strikebreakers took over the jobs on the docks. Most of the ILA men who supported the 1923 dock strike in Vancouver were blacklisted, although some were gradually allowed to return to work when they were needed. Many Indian longshoremen were long banished from work on the docks.

...Many Indian and other longshoremen were banished from dockwork until 1935, while others were recruited as replacements. Tim Moody, whose father had been blacklisted after the 1923 strike, recalls how his family had to leave the Vancouver area to survive.

After his father had been forced to return to Squamish by the 1923 strike, the family lived by hunting and fishing with a cash income of \$4.86 a month in relief from band funds. For other money, the men fished all day from dugout canoes in Howe Sound and attempted to sell the catch to residents of Woodfibre and Britannia Beach.

In an ironic twist, the company union (the Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers Association) came under the influence of the Workers Unity League in the early 1930s. In 1935 it launched into a bitter dock strike in Vancouver. As part of its strikebreaking effort, the Shipping Federation recruited members of longshore families whom it had previously blacklisted. Some of the complexity and self-justifications involved is caught in a comment by Tim Moody.

Some would call us strikebreakers. But that is a matter of opinion. The men whose jobs we took were those who broke the strike of 1923. It was a case of need. We found it necessary to retain these positions. My father said that my grandfather had been a longshoreman and we had to hang on to what he had started. It was all we had.⁴¹

41. In 1942 Tim Moody, then President of the NVLA, and Joe Jerome, a Tsimshian who worked on the North Shore docks, threw their support behind the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union of Harry Bridges, and that year helped merge the various longshore associations as Local 501, the first ILWU local in Canada. (Philpott, S. 1963:47). Philpott also outlines the involvement of Burrard Squamish men in other unions after WW 2(1963:60-75).

Following the defeat of the 1935 strike the mainly Indian lumberhandlers of North Vancouver retained eighty-five jobs and were formed into a separate organization (the North Vancouver Longshoremen's Association). It was led by Frank Baker, Gus Band, and later Tim Moody, all Squamish men. Some of the strikers eventually were allowed to return to the docks but many of the older and more militant longshoremen were forced out of the industry forever.

However, in 1942, some of the leaders of the North Vancouver Longshoremen's Association threw their support behind an effort to have the International Longshore and Warehousemen's Union recognized as the bargaining agent of Vancouver dockworkers. This finally witnessed the establishment of a union able to defend the interests of longshoremen.

Reference of interest:

Philpott, Stuart B. *Trade Unionism and Acculturation: a comparative study of urban Indians and immigrant Italians*. MA, University of BC, Vancouver 1963.

- Contains an account of Squamish longshoremen and their history