No Quarter Required:
Japanese Experiences and Media Distortions in
the Steveston Fishers’ Strike of 1900

by
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Abstract

The brief histories of the Steveston Fishers’ Strike of 1900 are dominated by the arrival of the militia on 24 July and images of racialized violence between Japanese and white fishers. This thesis analyzes Japanese language sources and re-evaluates contemporary English language press reports to expand the strike narrative and demonstrate that Japanese fishers held significant negotiating power throughout the standoff. It argues that labeling Japanese as strikebreakers ignores their perspectives and goals in the labour dispute; however, this thesis also explains that there were important differences within the Japanese community and that to speak of a single Japanese perspective is to privilege individuals in positions of power who benefitted financially from fellow community members. It also demonstrates that by emphasizing tensions between groups of fishers, existing histories overlook the fact that the most violent acts of the month were done by the cannery owners through their connections with government.

Keywords: 1900 Steveston Fishers’ Strike; Japanese; Teiji Kobayashi; Japanese Fishermen’s Benevolent Society; British Columbia Regiment; Salmon Canneries
For Naoko
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Introduction

At six o’clock in the morning on 24 July 1900, two hundred armed militia forces with the order “shoot to kill,” arrived on the docks of Steveston, a small and quiet fishing village in south west British Columbia.¹ A few hours later thousands of Japanese fishers in two-man boats went to work on the Fraser River while thousands of white fishers looked on. Thousands more British Columbians read about violence on the waterfront between racialized groups of supposedly gun toting fishers – be it plans for violence in the future, or the thwarted plans of the past three weeks.² The Steveston fishers’ strike competed for space with foreign military campaigns and feisty provincial legislative debates, but still held a place on the front, back, and editorial pages of all British Columbia newspapers throughout July 1900. As a news item, the strike made for exciting copy with reporters discussing the spectre of daily violence. For fishers and canners, however, the strike was a lot of standing around and talking. The strike headlines better reflected rumours, stereotypes, and anti-union agendas than actual lived experiences; and for the most part, so have the strike histories. Historians of the

² “Excitement at White Heat: Fishermen’s Strike Rapidly Approaching the Acute Stage,” Vancouver Province, July 23, 1900, p1; “Japanese Fishermen Break the Deadlock: Three Thousand of Them Began Fishing at Steveston This Morning; To Prevent Any Trouble the Militia of Vancouver and New Westminster Were, Upon the Authority of Three Magistrates, Sent to the Salmon Centre –The Soldiers Hooted by a Crowd at the Wharf When Embarking,” Vancouver Daily World, July 24, 1900, p1; “The Strike on the Fraser: Calling Out of the Militia Has the Effect of Enabling Japanese Fishermen to Pursue Their Calling Unmolested,” Victoria Times Colonist, July 25, 1900, p1; “Militia Called Out: Fishermen’s Strike Reaches Critical Stage on Japanese Accepting Canners’ Offer,” New Westminster Daily Columbian, July 24, 1900, p1. (The Chicago Manual of Style does not require page numbers in newspaper citations but I have added them as I feel this is integral information for my discussion.)
strike have relied on these newspapers and consequently erroneously emphasized violence and strict categorization of racialized groups in their narratives.

As the strike is not considered a major event in BC history, historians justifiably afford it limited space in wider ranging narratives; however, these brief overviews reify key misconceptions about Japanese life in BC in 1900, in part, due to the newspaper source base that histories draw on. The lack of press interest in the actions of the Japanese fishers led to an extremely limited number of events being considered typical of the Japanese experience. This thesis complicates the conventional narrative of this strike by placing the earliest extant accounts of the strike from differing Japanese perspectives – the Japanese language account compiled by Teiji Kobayashi – into conversation with the daily reports of the contemporary English language newspapers in British Columbia, and numerous government documents. This examination challenges prevailing assumptions in the existing historiography, expands the number of events that are considered part of this strike’s history, and builds a more nuanced narrative of the strike events. It demonstrates that rumours in the contemporary press have passed into the historiography leading to a mistaken portrayal of the strike as a violent standoff between white fishers who, through the British Columbia Fishermen’s Union (BCFU), held out for more money, and Japanese who supposedly capitulated to the demands of the cannery owners. It establishes that, in contrast to this dominant narrative, the Japanese, largely through the Japanese Fishermen’s Benevolent Society (JFBS or dantai), were active and effective negotiators throughout the standoff and that they did not abandon the BCFU’s price demand, but rather fought for and accepted their own rate.  

The respective perspectives reflected in Japanese and English language sources are as important to this project as their documentation of events. The daily newspaper

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reports add important detail to the few key events and symbols that have dominated the brief histories of this event and bring to light numerous incidents that have not yet garnered inclusion in written histories, but this thesis also examines the way in which the production of this history in July 1900 was a historical event in its own right. The daily news accounts demonstrate that editing room attitudes towards labour and capital changed as July progressed, and this change in attitude affected the tone and content of the news accounts that have become the basis of the historical record. For this reason the project is organized chronologically and the narrative is intentionally constructed in the order that Steveston residents experienced events in July 1900. Longer-term issues and themes that are not representative of the events of a single day are discussed in the context of events that they shape and inform. Although the Japanese language work of Kobayashi is key to allowing this project to discuss aspects of the strike that have been obscured by a language barrier, this is not intended to be solely a Japanese history of the strike. The relationships that Japanese leaders and fishers held with white capitalists and fishers are key to expanding our understanding of Japanese experiences, but so, too, are the relationships that Kobayashi does not discuss, those between white labour and white capital. The prevailing narrative stresses negative relations between the white and Japanese fishers, and positive relations between the canners and the JFBS. This thesis argues that racialized animosity, while central to lives of Steveston residents in 1900, has been overemphasized in the historiography to the point that the Japanese have been presented as a homogeneous group, and also – but separately – the confrontational actions of the BCFU have overshadowed the hidden actions of the capitalist cannery owners who used connections in government to affect the events on the ground and in the water.

These arguments, combined with the expanded narrative of the strike, and the various perspectives reflected in the sources examined here give this seemingly minor event an important place in Japanese-Canadian history and BC labour history. Resource exploitation was central to early British Columbian development and, as this thesis
demonstrates, Japanese were not “peripheral” to this history. The Japanese language records reveal an active participation in price negotiations that add to Japanese immigrants’ contributions to labourers’ struggles in the early years of BC’s industrialization – and challenge popular notions that they were mere tools of capitalists, brought in to lower the cost of labour in the province. The importance of this change in perspective reflects the observations made by Chris Friday in his examination of the American canning industry: “The story of these Asian and Asian American workers shows how labor, resources, and capital are allocated within a world system for the ultimate benefit of those with the greatest political and economic power.” The same was true for Japanese fishers in Steveston. The 1900 Steveston fishers’ strike demonstrates that Japanese – although severely limited in their employment options – did not only negotiate from positions of weakness in dealing with their employers, and that to label them as strikebreakers is to narrow the scope of BC history to reflect only the perspective of people who had the opportunity to make their voices loudly heard in the press in 1900.

This thesis determines the strike to be a key moment in the establishment of what community historian Mitsuo Yesaki has labeled as “A Japanese Village on the British Columbia Coast.” The expanded narrative of the events of July 1900 reveals numerous examples of specific commitment to community development amongst the JFBS leaders in Steveston. In doing so, however, this thesis also demonstrates that Japanese-Canadian history is not a story of a homogeneous experience. As important as the JFBS was to protecting the interests of Japanese members of the Steveston community, there were significant divides in the Japanese community. Although a march of four thousand unified JFBS fishers is the image that marks the climax of this story, to be Japanese in Steveston in 1900 was not always to be in unity with the JFBS. There

5 Friday, Organizing Asian American Labor, 1.
are few individual voices in the surviving documents, but histories of Japanese experiences in early British Columbia still need to reflect a sense of divergent opinion in the community; historians must be careful not to misconstrue this apparent silence as confirmation of misguided stereotypes of Japanese passivity and homogeneity.

**Primary Sources**

In 1935, Teiji Kobayashi, the sixteenth president of the dantai, published a history of the JFBS. It is a rich compilation of documents and personal commentary that remains largely un-translated in a published form, and is consequently under-utilized in discussing Japanese experiences in British Columbia; in particular, scholars have not given it serious consideration when discussing the Steveston strike of 1900. As part of this thesis project, I have personally translated the sections that pertain to the 1900 Steveston fishing strike. Many of these translated sections are reproduced within the textual narrative of this thesis.

Kobayashi wrote during a time of change in the dantai’s structure. In 1934 the dantai drafted a new constitution and conducted a detailed census of the Japanese residents in Steveston. It was the first revision of the constitution in thirty-four years and was done to reflect the great changes in the needs of the community that the dantai served. As the 1934 census numbers demonstrate, the 1930s community in which Kobayashi wrote bore little resemblance to the community of 1900 that he described. An adult population that had been overwhelmingly made up of male fishers in 1900 was forty six percent female by 1934, and families with children were common.7 While the 1900 constitution focused on fishing issues, the 1934 document reflected these changes and included clauses dealing with midwifery and children’s general education.8

Kobayashi’s title – *Sutebusuton Gyosha Jizen Dantai 35 Nen Shi (The 35 Year History*  

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8 Masako Fukawa with Stanley Fukawa, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet: BC’s Japanese Canadian Fishermen* (Mandeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2009), 78. The details of the 1900 JFBS constitution will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis.
of the Steveston Fishermen’s Benevolent Society) – reflects a 1908 decision by the JFBS to remove the words “Fraser River” and “Japanese” from their name and replace them with “Steveston;” amidst all the changes in the Japanese community, British Columbian society remained full of racialized animosity well beyond the 1930s. It is impossible to judge the extent to which Kobayashi’s motivation for publishing went beyond the desire to make community documents publicly available for posterity; however, his decision to do so has resulted in one of historians’ only windows into Japanese experience that is not filtered through the lenses of white British Columbian governmental institutions or mass media. In many cases Kobayashi’s text reproduces primary documents such as diaries and official records, and as the actual original documents are no longer available, his work constitutes the best evidence we have of varying Japanese perspectives. As this thesis will demonstrate throughout, his collection allows for a more complex understanding of events as the documents reveal personal voices of Japanese individuals and include details of conversations within the leadership of the JFBS not found anywhere else.

Kobayashi’s account will be read together with government documents from the British Columbia Legislative Assembly and the daily accounts of contemporary newspapers. The first collection of government documents that are referred to at length in this thesis are the transcripts of forty-five telegrams and letters that were sent to and from the Attorney General’s office between 10 July and 24 July, 1900. These are examples of the channels and relationships that existed between cannery owners and

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9 Fukawa, Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet, 78.
10 Many Japanese language sources such as the newspapers Minshu, Canada Shimpo, and Rodo Shuhu, have been lost over time. These papers may even make up some of the source material in the Kobayashi text. If these documents and journals were to be found in the future, they would be an invaluable resource to expand on this project. These sources - though not now available - are all mentioned by fisher Ryuichi Yoshida in interviews with historian Rolf Knight. See: Rolf Knight and Maya Koizumi, A Man of Our Times: The Life History of a Japanese-Canadian Fisherman (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1979), 38-51.
the provincial authorities. The second collection of documents is the collated transcripts of a committee that sat between 23 and 27 August 1900 and was charged with examining the circumstances surrounding the calling of the militia to the waterfront. As the committee dealt with many issues that are not mentioned in the contemporary newspapers, the transcripts offer especially valuable examples of how individuals of different perspectives viewed the rumoured violence. They also offer a first hand view of the decision process that led to the militia being called to Steveston, and the perspectives towards labourers and capitalists that the people with the power to make this decision held.

The English language newspapers discussed and referenced in this thesis are all “British Columbia newspapers.” They all included sensational headlines, patent referral to – and reliance on – wild rumours, racialized characterizations, and a persistent downplaying of the importance of members of society who were not defined as white. As there are important differences between the newspapers, however, their evidence is

11 British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen on the Fraser River, Sessional Papers, 1900, No 64 (Victoria, Attorney General’s Office, 1900). Correspondents included Premier James Dunsmuir, Attorney General D.M. Eberts, Assistant Attorney General H.A. Maclean, R.E. Gosnell (the Premier’s Private Secretary), four provincial police constables, a government agent, two individual cannery owners, the Fraser River Canners’ Association, and the president of the Vancouver Board of Trade.

12 British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, Report of Select Committee re Calling Out Militia at Steveston, August 27, 1900, Appendices, clxii-clxxix (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1900). The sixteen men – and no women – were the three Justices of the Peace that signed the militia requisition, the Colonel who led the militia forces, five police officers of various rank, a cannery owner, a cannery manager, a municipal tax collector, a fisher from the Musqueam First Nation, the secretary of the British Columbia Fishermen’s Union (BCFU), a BCFU fisher, and a representative from the JFBS executive.

13 The Sessional Papers were clearly consulted when the Select Committee report was being collated as there is a humorous mistake that is carried over from one to the other. On page 1007, a telegram that Constable Lister sent on 23 July, alerting the Attorney General that he had successfully arrested Frank Rogers is mistakenly dated 13 July. The transcript of Rogers’ testimony at the Select Committee hearing includes his correct statement that he was arrested on 23 July, the night before the militia came to Steveston. However, the clerk who collated the report, referring to the Sessional Papers, left the following comment: “Note – After discussion, it would seem that witness is confused in the dates of his arrest and the calling out of the Militia. He was arrested on the 13th; the Militia came on the morning of the 24th”, Report of Select Committee re Calling Out Militia at Steveston, clxxvii.
discussed individually. Five papers have been referred to extensively. The *Victoria Daily Colonist*, *New Westminster Daily Columbian*, and the *Vancouver News Advertiser* were staunchly pro-business newspapers that were unapologetically and unswervingly critical of labour movements. In contrast, the *Vancouver Daily World* and *Vancouver Province* promoted a middle ground, and were interested in projecting themselves as neutral sources of information. They published letters throughout the month defending themselves against claims that they were anti-business or anti-labour. These papers became increasingly critical of the strike leadership as the labour position became less popular near the end of the strike, to the point that the BCFU actually organized boycotts of both papers.

**Note on Terminology**

All of these newspapers described racialized individuals and groups in ways that in 2012 are distasteful. Japanese, for example, were referred to in ways that mocked and stereotyped their physical appearance. First Nations people were consistently portrayed as aggressive – often murderous. Most relevant to this thesis is the use of the word “Jap” to describe Japanese people. It is difficult to assess exactly how the word “Jap” was intended because it was used more than fifty percent of the time that Japanese people were being discussed. Even in the governmental Select Committee interviews that followed the strike, the translator for Kamekichi Oki, the lone Japanese interviewee, used the word “Jap” three times in translating Oki’s testimony – without ever using the word “Japanese.”¹⁴ The word was used in situations where it had a clearly derogatory, racist intention, and in other cases where it meant to signify any person of Asian appearance presumed to be of Japanese national origin. This word and other negative, insensitive, stereotyped classifications of the Japanese and First Nations people are included in some of the quotations used as evidence in this thesis. In general, when the context suggests that the quotation is attempting to racially denigrate, this is addressed in the analysis of the quotation – but in cases where it is used merely

¹⁴ British Columbia, *Calling Out Militia at Steveston*, clxix.
as a descriptive adjective indicating a person from the country of Japan, it is not discussed.

This thesis discusses the experiences of people who self identified with imprecise, inconsistent, and contradictory racial categories. It therefore uses the terms “white” and “Japanese” not to preserve mistaken notions of race as biological fact, but rather to refer broadly to the groups involved in the strike in terms that were meaningful at the time. Race, as Andrea Geiger and others have noted, is “a social and historical construction that lacks any meaningful biological basis.” As John Lutz explains, “scientists have found more genetic variability within the well-known divisions we call races than there is between them.” It is, as Ian Haney-Lopez states, “not a measured fact, but a preserved fiction,” that “is a matter not of physical difference, but of what people believe about physical difference.” Still, racial categories are important in analyzing the events of 1900 because the individuals involved identified with them. Kobayashi’s work indicates that the Japanese fishers in Steveston strongly identified themselves as being nihonjin ryoushi, i.e. Japanese fishers. The white fishers and canners operated in a system that afforded them the privileges of “whiteness” whether their personal conceptions of the white race were consistent or accurate — they were

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after all, neither. The terms white and Japanese are used here therefore to refer to groups of people who self identified as such and who were likewise referred to as such in the contemporary sources that this project uses. I use the term racialization instead of race to emphasize the process involved in categorizing people and to get away from notions of biological determinism.

The Steveston Fishing Community

The salmon canning industry emerged as a mainstay of the BC economy in the late 19th century. The number of canneries in Steveston increased dramatically in the decade before the 1900 strike from sixteen to forty-six. With this expansion came drastic changes in working conditions for fishers – even though the method of catching salmon, gillnetting, did not change in this period. In 1889 most fishers worked directly for a single cannery, earning an hourly wage. Approximately one hundred and fifty independent fishers also bought strictly controlled licences and sold their catch to the


highest bidding cannery. By 1899, the number of independent fisher licences had grown beyond 3,600, and the wage system had been completely replaced.20

Fraser River sockeye runs and catches were reasonably predictable, based on a four-year cycle: a high run year was followed by a medium run year, and then the following two years were low run years.21 Although salmon prices were inversely related to the number of fish expected in a given year, the canners’ price offers and the fishers’ price demands fluctuated wildly, affected not only by the number of fish in a given year but also by the level of co-operation among and between the canners and the different groups of fishers. Cooperation, however, proved very difficult for all groups involved. The canners, for example, attempted to co-ordinate an offer of eight to ten cents per fish in the low and medium cycle years of 1894, 1895, and 1896. Unable to unite in their price demands, their competition for labour instead pushed prices up to twenty-five cents until each year’s respective heavy run dropped prices to around five cents per fish.22 1898 proved to be an unexpected low run and prices went once again to the twenty five cent range. 1899 was different. The price of twenty-five cents was near constant, but for reasons that would prove especially important in 1900. Ralston notes that the high price was not due to low fish numbers as it was in 1898, but rather it was due to competition between the canneries.23 The canners would be much more keen to enforce a unified pricing policy in their combine the following year.

21 Keith Ralston, “Patterns of Trade and Investment on the Pacific Coast, 1867-1892: The Case of the British Columbia Salmon Canning Industry,” BC Studies, no.1. (Winter 1968-69), 39. 1893 and1897 were heavy run years, 1894 and 1898 medium runs, and 1895, 1896, 1899, and 1900 were low run years.
22 Ralston, “The 1900 Strike,” 64. While only one year in four was a dominant year, each year’s run was uneven and there were generally short periods in which an increased supply of fish occurred.
23 Ralston, “The 1900 Strike,” 70.
The dominant run years of 1893 and 1897 saw conflicts on the water that foreshadowed what was to come in 1900. In 1893 the British Columbia Licencing Commission increased the number of independent licences. The independent fishers, who up to then held the limited number of licences on a renewable basis, were not supportive of spreading their privileged position; they singled out the Japanese specifically, demanding that the Department of Fisheries not sell them licences. The Japanese, First Nations, and white fishers did work together to a degree that year; they unsuccessfully and mostly uncoordinatedly resisted canner price demands of ten cents. 1897 saw the three groups of fishers join together loosely as they had in 1893, to resist the canners’ offer of eight cents. The three groups grudgingly came together and formed a committee that demanded 15 cents throughout the season. Once again, however, prices dropped – this time to two cents – when one of the heaviest runs in Steveston’s history arrived in late July.

Canners of Fraser River sockeye salmon had an established and growing market in England: getting cans of Fraser River fish to Britain merchants was big business. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s British investment and consolidation replaced local independent ownership in most Steveston canneries. David Reid has demonstrated that the consolidation of canneries was not a case of attempting to use economies of scale to make the industry more efficiently productive, but rather a calculated attempt to gain higher profits from being a single buyer (monopsony) that could use a coordinated strategy to lower the cost of labour. While competition between groups of canners had continued throughout the 1890s as summarized above, in 1900 the cannery owners successfully formed a combine known as the Fraser River Canners’ Association. All

canneries in the Steveston area paid significant bonds to guarantee that they would not pay more per fish than the agreed upon rate.\textsuperscript{28}

The fishers organized themselves as well. The white fishers organized into two separate unions: the New Westminster Fisherman’s Union (NWFU), and in Vancouver, the British Columbia Fishermen’s Union (BCFU). Fishers from the Lax Kw’alaams First Nation were organized under the leadership of Chief Kelly, but bargained with the canneries through the BCFU.\textsuperscript{29}

Japanese fishers initially formed the\textit{ dantai} in 1897, and later incorporated it as a benevolent society in June 1900 – just a month before the strike began. The JFBS was not a labour union, although it did negotiate on behalf of the Japanese fishers in Steveston. As a benevolent society the JFBS had many important functions in the Japanese community – including the building and administration of a school and a hospital for the Japanese residents of Steveston.\textsuperscript{30} In the JFBS’s “Declaration for Incorporation” – an English language document – four purposes were listed for the society:

(a.) To generally promote the interests of the Japanese engaged in the fisheries on the Lower Fraser River; (b.) To build, equip and maintain a hospital at Steveston for the use of the Japanese; (c) To build equip and maintain a school for Japanese at Steveston; (d) To maintain and foster good understanding between the Japanese and Cannerymen.\textsuperscript{31}


\textsuperscript{29} Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 81,90; “The Fishermen’s Strike,” \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser}, July 15, 1900, 8.

\textsuperscript{30} In 1897 the JFBS took over the administration of a Japanese hospital located in a church building that had been in operation since 1894, and then in June 1900 they successfully opened a separate hospital that could “accommodate fifty patients.” Fukawa, \textit{Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet}, 74, 76.

\textsuperscript{31} Reprinted in Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 66.
These wide-ranging goals put members of the JFBS executive in situations where their own personal gains would have been at odds with confrontational strategies of negotiation with the cannery owners.

Historiography

Many historians who examine white racism towards Asian residents in BC society or labour conflicts in BC’s resource based industries, mention the strike as a discussion point in larger arguments. The strike, however, has not been the focus of a specific investigation since H.K. Ralston’s unpublished MA thesis in 1965.32 Ralston’s thesis focuses specifically on the relationship between the BCFU and the white cannery owners, with Japanese fishers only entering his narrative as tools that the cannery used against the union. His argument that the seemingly failed strike action should be seen as a long term success because it resulted in the union being recognized by the cannery owners is an important piece of BC labour history. As such, it is also a significant component of the history of Japanese fishers in British Columbia. Ralston’s analysis, however, is hardly revealing of Japanese experiences. Other works of labour history that briefly mention the strike, whether preceding Ralston or directly referencing his work, emphasize the attempts of the BCFU’s socialist leadership to resist the cannery owners by uniting fishers across racialized boundaries.33 They all, however, fail to consider the events from the perspective of the Japanese fishers.

Many histories that focus on white racism in BC also make brief mention the strike. These works tend to emphasize the conflict between white and Japanese fishers and spend little if any time reviewing the role of the capitalist cannery owners. Non-

32 Ralston, “The 1900 Strike.”
academic community histories make up an important subsection of this branch of the historiography. For example, journalist Ken Adachi’s *The Enemy that Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* remains the most comprehensive look at Japanese-Canadian history; however, his examination of the strike in a chapter titled “Confrontations,” depicts a situation in which white and Japanese fishers fought each other and the militia then saved the village from an impending race riot. Not only does this narrative leave the role of the cannery owners largely unexamined, but Adachi also assumes that the cannery owners came to the aid of Japanese fishers by protecting them from violent intimidation by the BCFU.

Daphne Marlatt’s oral history collection of Japanese fishers’ voices, *Steveston Recollected: A Japanese-Canadian History* includes comments from fishers regarding strike action and a number of sections from Teiji Kobayashi’s work translated by Maya Koizumi. The collection offers provocative descriptions of early Japanese experiences in British Columbia, including an abridged section from Kobayashi titled, “A Japanese Account of the Strike of 1900.” However, Marlatt is not a historian, and makes no attempt to analyze these accounts. The individuals interviewed in Marlatt’s work do contextualize the events to some degree, but they also align their overwhelmingly negative impressions of strike action in the fishing industry with notions of racialized national character.

The narratives of Steveston community members Masako Fukawa and Mitsuo Yesaki include important details of the strike that have eluded other historians of the event. Fukawa’s work, for example, includes the only mention in the historiography of the cannery owners’ opening price offer of fifteen cents—a key negotiation detail that will be further discussed here in Chapter 1. Because Fukawa focuses specifically on fishers’

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38 Fukawa, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet*; Yesaki, *Sutebusuton*. 
experiences, her work also offers vivid description of working and living conditions and contextualizes these by including discussions of community formation including details of the establishment of the JFBS and its early constitutions. However, with respect to the strike of 1900, Fukawa relies on secondary sources that repeat misconceptions about the imposition of martial law by legal authorities to end a race riot.\(^{39}\) She also sees the BCFU as primarily a racist organization with the goal of “the removal of Japanese fishermen from the Pacific Coast” while at the same time noting, without recognizing the contradiction, that the BCFU had approached the JFBS in an attempt to resist the canners.\(^{40}\) Yesaki discusses the existence of economic divisions within the Japanese community; however, he seems to see these economic divisions as natural, and describes the strike events as “racial antagonism between ethnic groups of fishermen.”\(^{41}\) He makes an important yet offhand mention of class divisions within Steveston’s white community, noting that the canners exploited divisions between the racialized groups of fishers for their own benefit. However, he subsequently leaves unexplored the important roles of the canners and the Japanese house bosses in exploiting the situation for their own advantage.

Academic historians W. Peter Ward and Patricia Roy include analysis of the strike in their discussions of race relations in BC. Ward’s work is referenced often in the community histories discussed above and therefore carries an important and continued influence. Ward was a central figure in a debate amongst BC historians in the 1980s as to whether race or class was to be considered more influential. While such binaries have largely been abandoned, his review of the 1900 Steveston fishers’ strike reflects his

\(^{39}\) Fukawa, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet*, 100.

\(^{40}\) Fukawa, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet*, 76.

\(^{41}\) Yesaki, *Sutebusuton*, 16.
personal emphasis on race relations." For Ward, communities are seen as unified, and the canners are firmly in the background of a struggle that he describes as “interracial strain” that “pitted white and Japanese fishermen against one another in open confrontation and in doing so had seriously inflamed race relations on the Fraser.”

Roy’s description of the events in July 1900, while also focusing on “race” relations, offers the most nuanced view of the strike. Roy notes that the racialized groups of fishers tenuously co-operated, and she historicizes the nature of newspaper reporting by noting that newspapers encouraged false and exaggerated rumours of gun ownership on the docks. Though brief, Roy’s mention of these points serves as a starting point for this project, as does her observation that media and police pressure “helped persuade the provincial government to accede to the canners’ request for additional protection.”

And finally, while not addressing the strike or even discussing events within thirty years of it, Peter Nunoda’s 1991 unpublished doctoral dissertation, “A Community in Transition and Conflict: The Japanese-Canadians 1935-1952,” offers an important point of diversion from Japanese-Canadian historiography, which this project also aims to explore. Nunoda argues that the emphasis in Japanese-Canadian histories has been so strongly on racialized relations between Japanese and white British Columbians that the Japanese in BC are often presented as being of a single unified economic interest. Speaking of Japanese-Canadian historians specifically, Nunoda notes that: “While none of these authors would argue that white British Columbia society was classless, this is


exactly the monolithic picture created of the Japanese Canadians." To study the differences within the Japanese community, he argues is "not to denigrate the achievements of the Issei or Nisei but only to widen our understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of a community..."  

This project builds on important contributions made by these professional and community historians and also seeks to move beyond some of the generalizations that many of their works perpetuate. It will develop a more nuanced version of the strike by including events that contradict racialized stereotypes, by articulating divisions within the racialized communities involved, and by presenting Japanese experience as more than just a response to white working class racism. In doing so, this thesis will demonstrate how even brief histories of Japanese experiences – whether of the 1900 strike or other events – need not put Japanese on the periphery of the story just because they were legally and socially marginalized. The evidence examined here is specific to the events in Steveston in July 1900, however, the generalizations that it contradicts are not. Chris Friday’s claim regarding Asian residents and immigrants working in American canneries is just as true for Japanese in Steveston: “While they tacitly accepted the boundaries set by economic, political, and social forces beyond their control, in their immediate surroundings they sought to function as actors, not mere subjects.” Studies of other events in this period that expand their source base in similar ways to include Japanese language sources, and critical re-evaluations of contemporary English language sources will most likely find similar counter evidence to the common stereotyped generalizations that linger in some of the historiography of this period.

47 Friday, Organizing Asian American Labor, 6.
Chapter 1: A Special Arrival

Table 1: Timeline of Events (July 1\textsuperscript{st} to July 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1900)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st}</td>
<td>Sockeye season officially starts. Strike technically begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} – 6\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Steveston quiet. Newspapers discuss price demands daily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5\textsuperscript{th}?6\textsuperscript{th}?7\textsuperscript{th}?</td>
<td>Signs appear in Steveston calling for Japanese to be shot if they go out fishing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Large BCFU parade in Steveston.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>Up to 1,000 Japanese take out boats in defiance of the BCFU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>BCFU visits Japanese bunkhouses and warns them not to fish. BCFU water patrols start. Returning Japanese fishers have their fish thrown out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>JFBS demands better strike terms from BCFU. Canneries ask Attorney General to send police protection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>BCFU president arrested on charges of intimidation. Special provincial constables start to arrive in Steveston.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1900, the sockeye season officially started on 1 July, and as the fishers and canners had not agreed to terms, the fishers’ strike technically started on the same day. The salmon did not start to run in significant numbers until the middle of July’s second week that year, however, so with no fish to catch, neither fishers’ wages nor canners’ profits were being lost and there was little in the way of pressure to solve the dispute. There were, however, newspapers to sell; in these first quiet days the English language press discussed fishers’ and canners’ price demands and openly announced that the Japanese fishers would defy the BCFU as soon as the salmon run started in earnest –
an assumption that largely survives in the current historiography. The first full weekend of July brought the first significant activity: thousands of white fishers and their supporters paraded around Steveston to promote their cause on the Saturday, but almost a thousand Japanese fishers went out in defiance of the BCFU’s demands the very next day. Hundreds of BCFU fishers responded by purposefully marching through the Japanese bunkhouse district, demanding that the Japanese stop fishing. Consequently, over the next three days, the BCFU and JFBS agreed to send out patrol boats to ensure that no more fishing took place for less than the union demand of twenty-five cents; virtually all fishing stopped. The Canners’ Association responded by contacting the Attorney General’s office and warning Victoria that rioting in Steveston was imminent if the government did not deploy increased police forces to stop what they categorized as union intimidation. The government acted quickly and sent special constables to Steveston the very next day; the president of the BCFU was summarily arrested. The cannery owners were able to demonstrate that the dispute carried legal consequences for fishers who challenged their position.

This chapter, while tracing the events of the first eleven days of July outlined above, argues that the existing historiography of this event relies too heavily on unchallenged newspaper accounts that assume Japanese weakness, and therefore overlooks significant JFBS negotiating power in this standoff – power they demonstrated both in their interactions with canners and the BCFU. Additionally, rumours reported in July 1900 newspaper articles have passed unchallenged into the historical memory of this event, creating a misconception of Japanese unity regarding both their experiences and their attitudes to labour confrontations. The hierarchical racialized ordering of BC society grossly disadvantaged Japanese residents and necessitates that JFBS actions be understood in this context. However, the discussion here also emphasizes the ways

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48 “Salmon Are Scarce,” Vancouver Daily World, July 3, 1900, p.3.
49 “Japs Own the River,” Vancouver Daily World, July 9, 1900, p.5.
50 “A Crisis Impending,” Vancouver Province, 10 July, 1900, p.9.
51 “The Salmon Fishing,” Vancouver News Advertiser, July 10, 1900, p.5.
in which the cannery owners were able to quietly use their access to provincial policing power and Japanese consular authority to their advantage in this dispute to have BCFU members arrested, to forge connections with the JFBS leadership, and to protect their own economic interests through threats of violence that were hidden behind the official authority and badges of the special police. The majority of histories of this event are brief and overlook these actions and connections by categorizing the strike only as a racialized standoff. As this thesis demonstrates in this and subsequent chapters, however, these actions and connections played an important role in shaping individual Japanese fishers’ experiences, and in influencing the JFBS’s decision-making process.

1.1: The Newspapers Discuss Price

Even in the first quiet days of July the English language press recognized the seriousness of the fishers’ and canniers’ impasse. All papers published daily strike reports that focussed on the price demands of each side. According to these newspapers, the canniers’ demanded that the fishers accept twenty cents per sockeye, and the BCFU demanded the canniers pay twenty-five cents. And in these first discussions of price the newspapers fostered an important misconception about Japanese fishers; a misconception that continues in the historiography of the event. By using twenty cents and twenty-five cents as negotiation starting points the contemporary press and the subsequent historiography overlooked the key role Japanese fishers, through the JFBS, played in raising the canniers’ offer from fifteen cents to twenty cents. This additional information – made clear in Kobayashi’s account – forces a reconsideration of the persistent assumption in the historiography that the Japanese had a total lack of negotiating power and were forced into the role of strikebreakers.53

Ironically, even though English language newspapers failed to note this role, they do contain numerous indirect indications that the JFBS’s power to negotiate was well understood by BCFU fishers, cannery owners, and by journalists alike.

The English language press referred to twenty cents as the “canners’ price” and claimed that the Japanese fishers would happily break union ranks and fish for this price. The \textit{Daily World}, for example, offered such an image of Japanese as being averse to fighting over wages: “The Japanese are willing to take 20 cents, at least they are not prepared to fight the question with the white men. Rather they think that the white men shall fight out the battle of rates for everyone.” While the JFBS was not wholly committed to fighting for twenty-five cents, and the \textit{Daily World} report is reflective of this, notions of Japanese readiness to fish at any price the “white men” decided on are short sighted. They overlook the earlier JFBS struggle to get the price raised from fifteen cents to twenty cents.

Teiji Kobayashi’s work demonstrates that although BC’s racially hierarchical society severely limited Japanese fishers’ options, many resilient individuals proved willing and able to resist both cannery owners and the BCFU. Kobayashi indicates that the JFBS reacted indignantly to the canners’ opening offer and showed a strong willingness to work with non-Japanese fishers to raise it. In his words:

The canners had always waited to announce fishing prices until all fishermen were finished preparing for the coming season. This was without a doubt to prevent fishermen’s protests. [1900] was to be a low fish year. That this meant higher fish prices is something that even an elementary child understood. “This year prices will go up without a doubt,” fishermen thought as they waited for the canneries to post the season’s prices. However, the canneries did not take into account the expectations of the fishermen. For most Japanese fishermen everything was related to

54 The assumption that the price that the Japanese were willing to fish at was the price that was set by the canners is mentioned throughout the month in all daily newspapers. Among many examples are: \textit{Victoria Daily Colonist}, July 14, 1900, p2; \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser}, July 24,1900, p5; For one example of the press claiming the Japanese would break ranks see: “Salmon Are Scarce,” \textit{Vancouver Daily World}, July 3,1900, p3.

the affiliated cannery house in which they lived so … they were left in a very weak [bargaining] position. …When the price announcement finally came, it was a betrayal – 15 cents a fish. This was inferior to the high run years. Although this was understood to be a sign that the canneries would act much more stubbornly this year, the fishermen’s complaints were loud, and they put all their energy into negotiating.\textsuperscript{56}

Representatives of the BCFU and JFBS then worked together to raise the price.\textsuperscript{57} Contrary to past historical accounts, rather than being powerless to negotiate terms with the canners or being involved in a pitched racial standoff with white labourers, Japanese, largely though the JFBS, appear to have found successful strategies to negotiate what they saw as the best possible deal for themselves – occasionally resisting the demands of their employers, and occasionally cooperating across racialized boundaries with other fishers.

Although widespread anti-Asian sentiment prevented discussion of Japanese influence on the ensuing events in the English language press in a direct or positive manner, the accounts in the July 1900 newspapers support Kobayashi’s evidence and indicate that JFBS influence was well understood and respected. For example, on 13 July, a \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser} editorial blamed the Japanese for the twenty-five cent rate.

\begin{quote}
It has been stated - and we have seen no contradiction of it by any reasonable authority that the white fishermen had originally decided to name twenty cents per fish as the price they would be willing to accept but that on a conference with the Japanese fishermen the latter intimated that they wanted twenty-five cents and accordingly that price was decided on as the minimum and it is the amount which the main body of fishermen insist they must have.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Without directly connecting JFBS action to influence, this journalist betrays an understanding of it by identifying a causal connection between the purported Japanese

\textsuperscript{56} Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 79-80. [translated by author.]

\textsuperscript{57} Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 79-80.

\textsuperscript{58} “The Fraser River Fishery Dispute (editorial),” \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser}, July 14, 1900, p4.
demand for twenty-five cents and the strikers’ main rallying cry. In earlier negotiations the JFBS did suggest that the price of twenty-five cents be put forward to the canneries; however, the image that the paper promotes of this suggestion having the ability to overwhelm the BCFU was an exaggeration.\textsuperscript{59} Still, the fact that the editor made the argument in the first place – and in a paper that was a consistent and vocal opponent of both Asian immigration and labour unions – indicates that Japanese were understood to hold significant influence in the industry. The \textit{Daily World} is among the newspapers that presented this same argument again later in the month after the Japanese went back to work on 24 July, ahead of the BCFU and First Nations’ fishers.\textsuperscript{60} This line of protest against Japanese is significantly different from the complaint that they were brought in by capitalists to bring down wages, as within its reasoning is an indication of acknowledged Japanese influence in the industry.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{1.2: BCFU March and JFBS Fish}

The weekend of 7 and 8 July saw two major events on the Steveston waterfront. On the Saturday, the BCFU organized the first major procession of the month, and on Sunday a large group of Japanese fishers defied the BCFU work stoppage and went out fishing. The subsequent use of the press surrounding these events as historical evidence emphasizes racial confrontation by using specific, un-contextualized examples.

\textsuperscript{59} Ralston, “The 1900 Strike,” 106.

\textsuperscript{60} See for example \textit{Vancouver Daily World}, July 24, p1: “‘We would all have been fishing before now’ said a fisherman later in the morning, ‘but for the Japanese. We stayed by them while they wanted the strike to be kept up, and after we had committed ourselves and must stand by the 25 cents rate, then they abandoned us, as well as the Indians who have come from far up the coast to work in their old grounds.’”

\textsuperscript{61} BC newspapers frequently included articles or letters that complained that capitalists in BC’s resource industries lowered labour costs by bringing in Asian workers. While this was true to an extent, the contemporary press used Asian immigration to create fear that BC’s working class would eventually be enslaved by low wages. The \textit{Vancouver Daily World} published an article on 17 July that claimed capitalists were conspiring to send 1,000 Japanese labourers to Manitoba to take farm hand jobs away from “Ontario boys who come up for the Manitoba harvest each Summer [sic].” “The Asiatic Invasion,” \textit{Vancouver Daily World}, July 17, 1900, p6. Another particularly poignant example of this can be seen in a letter to the editor of the \textit{Vancouver Province} after the militia were sent to Steveston, in which the correspondent lamented that Asian immigration meant the coming end for the “Anglo-Saxon race.” “A Demagogue’s Incendiary Talk,” \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 26, 1900, p1.
This use of the press is arguably responsible for the perception in existing histories that Japanese fishers were disinterested in, if not fearful of, labour confrontations, and powerless to resist intimidation from cannery owners and the BCFU. It also presents the BCFU as a wholly racist organization – which is an overstatement that leads to the canners being described as helpful in comparison. For example, one of the most enduring yet misleading images of the strike in Japanese-Canadian historiography is a sign that appeared in various locations in Steveston during the first week of July. It has been connected to the BCFU and used as an example to support the notion that the strike was at its root a conflict between two racialized groups of fishers. Although the authorship of the sign is unknown, Patricia Roy is among the historians who have linked it directly to a successful BCFU attack on the Japanese. As she explains,

Through organization and intimidation, including the use of posters: “To White Fishermen and Indians: – Any Japanese or other fishermen selling fish at less than union rates, 25 cents, will be shot or have his boat stove in – the former preferred,” the Vancouver union got the Japanese to stop fishing effective 10 July 1900.62

Ken Adachi also quotes the entire text of the sign, and claims that it was carried in the 7 July union march as a “show of strength” against the Japanese.63 There is no evidence to support Roy’s claim that it was written as a form of intimidation by the BCFU, however, and the article from which Adachi quotes the sign’s language not only notes that the sign was “posted” instead of carried, but also emphasizes that the Japanese took little notice of it as they went out fishing that very day in large numbers.64

62 Roy, A White Man’s Province, 144.
63 Adachi, The Enemy that Never Was, 58. Although the Victoria Daily Colonist printed the text of the sign, Adachi seems to have added the information about it being carried in the march.
64 “The Strike on the Fraser,” Victoria Daily Colonist, July 11, 1900, p1. Although taken from the 11 July Daily Colonist, the report is noted to have been filed by the reporter on 9 July. The fishing it refers to is therefore that of 8 July.
The provincial dailies discussed the sign with an entirely different focus than Roy and Adachi. Far from claiming that the BCFU endorsed the sign, the *Province* indicated that the union sought to disown it.

During the morning the union men scoured the town searching for posters that had been placarded in various places; the text of these bills was that any Jap taking out a boat would be shot. The union was anxious that these posters should be removed, as the authorship might be credited to the organization.65

The sign’s appearance and message are important elements of the strike, but the BCFU response to it is arguably more telling of actual experiences of fishers in July 1900. The sign is an example of the anti-Japanese sentiment in British Columbia at the time, but using it specifically against the BCFU encourages a notion of the strike as a white versus Japanese, labour versus labour standoff, and overlooks the important role played by the cannery owners. Although the JFBS did decide to stop fishing on 9 July, just two days after the union march, the coincidental timing should not be used as evidence that the JFBS fishers’ decision was based on a fear of being shot by BCFU fishers, as Roy’s description suggests. The sign, instead, is a key piece of evidence that demonstrates that the strike was more than a racial struggle as different groups of white fishers attempted to distance themselves from it. Its prevalence in Japanese-Canadian historiography is evidence that rumour has moved unchecked from the pages of July 1900 newspapers to recent historical accounts.

Historians’ use of newspapers that referred to rumours has ironically overlooked one of the most prevalent rumours of the day: the notion that the Japanese fishers were heavily armed. While the sign suggested that the Japanese were targets for union guns, the most common rumour in July 1900 was that the Japanese were, to a man, bearers of loaded firearms. The *Daily Columbian*, combining this rumour with a derogatory attack on the Japanese for their supposed inability to understand BC law, noted, “They have procured arms in large numbers, and in their ignorance [of the law] are altogether likely

to use them unless watched and instructed.”\textsuperscript{66} When the front page of the \textit{Daily World} referred to the now infamous sign it made no mention of racialized categories; instead, the paper used the sign only to segue to the words of a “prominent local canneryman” who said that, “he knew it to be a fact that every Japanese boat was equipped with a rifle.”\textsuperscript{67} If this were true, it would have meant that the Japanese population in Steveston had some two thousand rifles in its possession. Although Japanese fishers fired no shots during the entire strike, their supposed ownership of guns was mentioned repeatedly by canners, by BCFU leadership, and by individual fishers. The notion became so pervasive that, after the strike was over, the Attorney General was asked in the Legislative Assembly, “Is it the intention of the Government to take steps to find out (1) the truth or falsity of the statement that the Japanese fishermen on the Fraser River carry fire-arms…?”\textsuperscript{68} To which the Attorney General answered simply, “Yes.”\textsuperscript{69}

Evidence indicates that the Japanese were not heavily armed – if armed at all. In the strike of 1901, there were once again no shots fired by Japanese. By 1902, when the Dominion government issued the “Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration” the topic was not mentioned, even though the report included discussion of Japanese immigration, the fisheries, boat building the lumber industry, “Other Industries,” and a chapter titled “How the Japanese are Regarded.”\textsuperscript{70} The chapter specifically dealing with the fisheries included interviews with six canners, a Chinese merchant, thirteen white fishers, nine First Nations Chiefs, and three officials – many of

\textsuperscript{66} “Trouble on the River,” \textit{New Westminster Daily Columbian}, July 11, 1900, p2. The report preceded this by noting: “The Japs appear to think that it will be quite legitimate for them to shoot any trespassers on their property, not realizing that hanging is in this country the penalty for assumption by private citizens of this function of officers of the law.”


\textsuperscript{68} British Columbia. Legislative Assembly. Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia, First Session, Ninth Parliament, 2\textsuperscript{nd} August, 1900, p113.

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Journals}, 113.

whom were active in July 1900 – yet not one respondent made any mention of Japanese gun ownership.71

More at issue than the Japanese guns is the excitement surrounding them that the canners, the BCFU, and the press exploited. The discussion of guns was real even if the presence of guns was not. The topic’s inclusion here is to incorporate the importance of rumour as a historical component of individual experience in order to add nuance to our understanding of events instead of privileging rumours with a place in the historical narrative. The excitement may not have reflected actual events, but its use was a historical event in its own right that affected the experiences of individuals at the time and retains a role in the histories of the events that do not question the veracity and underlying assumptions of the newspapers on which they are founded.

While the papers spoke in excited tones and built stories around the potential for irrational violence, Kobayashi’s text suggests that the power dynamic between the canners and the Japanese fishers was well understood by both sides. Although the excitement on the ground cannot be dismissed as being inconsequential, conclusions based on its role must be tempered to reflect the rational decisions that individuals made in the heat of the moment and the near total lack of actual violence in the month of July. While riots and martial law were discussion points at the time, neither actually occurred, and their prominent position in histories of this event needs to be checked with the understanding that they were rumours. In contrast, individual decisions made with consideration of individual circumstances need to play a more central role in strike histories. For example, Kobayashi’s work indicates that it was not with a sense of regret or fear that the JFBS alternately defied the demands of the BCFU by going out to fish on 8 July, and then the demands of the canners by deciding to honour the strike two days later. Instead, there seems to have been an understanding of the situation as it evolved over time, and decisions were made to respond to specific circumstances as they evolved. He describes the decision to go out and fish on 8 July not in terms of a fearful

encounter with potentially gun-toting BCFU members, but as a response to the canners’ decision to withhold the Japanese fishers’ food rations:

All the fishermen met on the dyke and started a work slow down – no one went out to work. However, it is important to note at this time that all the [Japanese] fishermen’s food was supplied by the canneries. This calculation [for how much food each fisher was owed] was made at the end of the fishing season and deducted by the canneries from each fisherman’s due remuneration – so this put the cannery owners in a very strong [bargaining] position.\(^\text{72}\)

The cannery owners, in short, controlled past and future salaries of the Japanese fishers. Much as the canners’ combine required bonds from their members to eliminate bidding between canneries, they also held a bond of sorts over the Japanese fishers in withheld wages.\(^\text{73}\)

Kobayashi’s records offer more evidence that Japanese defied both the cannery owners’ and the BCFU’s wishes, and that food was used as a weapon against them by both groups. One unnamed Japanese fisher’s diary explains:

[A]ll the fishermen participating in the strike understood that all their food supplies would be cut off. With this so-called “food offensive” method of attack, it was thought [by the canners] that the fishermen’s solidarity would be destroyed. As might be expected, this was a problem for the fishermen. They could not go without food. Because of this a few Japanese fishermen went out fishing. But when the white fishermen saw this they took away our fish.\(^\text{74}\)

This is a far cry from the description in the *Daily World* that categorized the Japanese as willing to go along with whatever the “white men” decided. And in showing a willingness

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\(^{72}\) Teiji Kobayashi, *35 Nen Shi*, 81. [translated by author]

\(^{73}\) 1900 was the first year that cannery owners worked together in a combine that aimed to both limit production and control prices. To ensure that members of the Canners’ Association did not bid against each other on fish prices, they each had to pay a bond to the association. See Ralston, “The 1900 Strike,” 93,111.

\(^{74}\) Teiji Kobayashi, *35 Nen Shi*, 81. [translated by author]
to take action that challenged the canners and the BCFU fishers, it complicates previous
depictions of the Japanese as either categorically against strikes, or powerless to resist
the cannery owners who employed them; it does so without endorsing the contemporary
rumours of Japanese gun ownership.

1.3: Channels of Communication

On the evening of 9 July, after a day of fishing in defiance of the BCFU, a
number of Japanese found a group of BCFU representatives waiting for them as they
returned to shore and docked their boats. The union fishers’ message was clear: no one
was to go out fishing again at any price less than twenty-five cents. Later that evening
BCFU secretary Frank Rogers held an impromptu meeting and gathered as many
people as he could to send this same message in a more forceful manner; the group
marched to the boarding houses where the Japanese fishers lived. This march was not
the same as the midday processions that jovially aimed to gain wider support for the
union cause. Its purpose was to stop the Japanese from fishing, peacefully if possible,
“but if not, then force would have to be used.” With approximately six hundred people
marching or lining the streets to see the throng, the marchers stopped at each Japanese
bunkhouse and “warned the Jap boss not to allow his men to fish. The Japs were
informed that if they made any attempt to fish for less than the Union rate there would be
trouble and some one [sic] would get hurt.”^75

This, however, was not entirely an anti-Japanese march. The Province report
noted that the marchers were made up of men from Canada, England, Portugal, Spain,
Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Port Simpson Lax Kw’alaams First Nation, Japan,
“and nearly every other nationality.” It also noted that a Japanese “in sympathy with the
Union” was reported to have acted as translator.^76 While organizers may have seen their
actions in strictly racialized terms, this event is an example of the difficult choices that
faced Japanese fishers in July 1900, and the wide variety of solutions they found for

^75 “A Crisis Impending,” Vancouver Province, 10 July, 1900, p9.
^76 “A Crisis Impending,” Vancouver Province, 10 July, 1900, p9.
their individual circumstances. While the JFBS made the official reports and provided statements to the English language newspapers, a number of individual fishers of Japanese nationality independently made the decision to act with or against the BCFU, the canniers, and the JFBS. In doing so, they demonstrated that there were differences within the Japanese community – differences that while absent in histories of the strike are evident even in English language newspapers that were little concerned with Japanese experiences.\textsuperscript{77}

While the BCFU resorted to marching through the Japanese bunkhouse district in numbers to send a message, the Canniers’ Association sent their messages through the Japanese consular office – an official channel that was not open to the BCFU. When the canniers wished to convince the JFBS that their view of the dispute was superior to that of the BCFU, they backed up their claims with the power of the provincial police forces, and messages that they had translated by the Japanese consulate. The BCFU, without the sufficient accumulation of capital to be afforded the same access to the province’s resources, was much more directly confrontational in its approach. Kobayashi’s recording of a memo that was signed by the Canniers’ Association and sent through the Japanese consul – in the Japanese language – to the JFBS offers a connection that has so far been absent from analysis of this event. On 10 July, at the request of the canniers the Japanese consul circulated the following warning/announcement directed at regular Japanese fishers:

Now there is a conflict with the fishermen. It appears that those who are engaged in fair fishing face increasing interference and threats of violence. The canniers’ cooperative has used a steamboat, ordered in police, and will see that safe fishing is guaranteed. Honest fishermen will be protected at any cost. Please take comfort in this protection and go out and fish industriously.

In the event that violence towards fishermen increases, you will defend yourself, but must never strike out at others. Furthermore, regarding evidence of violence, write down the person’s boat number, physical

\textsuperscript{77} These largely income determined fractures are further evidenced in Kobayashi’s account and in the JFBS constitution – as will be discussed in Chapter 3.
appearance and actions, and anything else you notice, as well as the date and time of the event. Submit your report to the cannery association and a reward will be paid. In the case that you meet a mob trying to damage fishing goods, or if someone is injured in a case like this, immediately take the injured person to help – the damages will be paid by the cannery association.

This announcement is from the Cannery Association

July 10, 33rd Year of Meiji [1900] 78

An official memo from the cannery association translated into Japanese and presented by the Japanese consul to the JFBS must have had a serious impact on the Japanese fishers in Steveston. That the canners were able to connect themselves in the message to the police and legal authority of the province is significant. If Rogers and the BCFU had had the option of calling Premier Dunsmuir or Attorney General Eberts to have them exert the power of the police to force the canners to act in unison with the union’s vision for the industry, they certainly would have taken it. And this would have presumably affected the way in which the JFBS reacted to BCFU advances. These differences in approach reflect as much about the state of industrial relations in BC in 1900 – one that saw an advantage to capital – as they indicate a racist and reactive BCFU and a calm and helpful Canners’ Association. The historiography of this event – and community historians in particular – will do well to move away from such notions.

To be sure, Rogers’ march through the Japanese bunkhouse district was an attempt at intimidation. Whether or not it was primarily racially motivated is debatable, however. While Adachi has classified BCFU actions as “near mortal combat against the Japanese,” framing the strike in strictly racialized terms ignores the role intimidation played in preventing strike breaking. 79 Racialized notions of personal and group identity were factors in ordering relations, but by no means were they the only ones. Of the multiple dimensions involved in the relationship between the BCFU and the JFBS, also

78 Teiji Kobayashi, 35 Nen Shi, p85. [translated by author]
79 Adachi, The Enemy that Never Was, 57.
important to consider is the fact that the BCFU fishers saw the JFBS as the canners’ most important weapon to break the strike. This is best seen in comparing the BCFU dealings with the JFBS to their actions towards the New Westminster Fishers’ Union (NWFU).

There were many reasons for the BCFU to attempt to intimidate the NWFU, but for the most part they did not. The NWFU, a union of “white” membership, publically disagreed with the BCFU’s stance of holding out for twenty-five cents; a sizable number of their membership fished on 17 July – six days earlier than the Japanese; and they fished for twenty cents a fish – the so called “canners’ rate.” The English language newspapers often used the New Westminster fishers’ position as support for anti-BCFU arguments, claiming that the NWFU served as evidence that all fishers would work for twenty cents if they were freed from labour agitators like Rogers and MacClain. And yet, there were no BCFU marches through New Westminster neighbourhoods demanding that they stay ashore. There were no fiery speeches aimed at dissenters in the NWFU. Instead, the BCFU focused their efforts on the JFBS. The difference in treatment, however, cannot be understood as entirely dependent on notions of racialized categories. The number of Japanese in the fishing industry, and their living quarters which were grouped together near the Steveston docks, were certainly relevant factors. It was relatively easy to walk to the Japanese bunkhouses in an evening because an overwhelming majority of JFBS fishers lived in close proximity to each other. More importantly, as the number of Japanese was far greater than that of the New Westminster fishers, the economic impact of the two groups’ actions cannot be equated. If the small number of New Westminster fishers defied the BCFU led strike action, their catch numbers would not have been great enough to produce much profit for the canners. However, if the Japanese fishers defied the strike and were able to fish without competition, their catch numbers would have had a much greater economic impact.

This is not to say that racialized animosity was not rampant in the BCFU, the JFBS, and in BC society in general. The coverage and language use in all BC newspapers, which serve as the foundation for earlier histories of this event, were highly racialized, and often racist. For example, BC’s Ninth Legislative Assembly began during the strike and received great approval from the Province for the government’s call for strict limits to Japanese immigration in the Speech from the Throne. More generally, the language used in the newspapers suggests that reporters felt it was acceptable to bully the Japanese fishers in a way that it would have been deemed an inappropriate way to treat “white people.” The individual newspapers differed in their portrayal of events, but there was a consistency in the underlying assumption that the Japanese were legitimate targets of violent intimidation, and although the month of July ended without any significant physical violence between the BCFU and the JFBS, the newspapers’ reporting of events did not discourage violence when speaking of the Japanese. The Daily World seemed almost to make comedy out of the idea of treating of the Japanese with force. In describing a union meeting that occurred in the evening of 8 July, the paper noted that the BCFU leadership wanted to hear from the JFBS. After the JFBS secretary refused an invite,

he was sent for again. He did not come again and the next time five men were sent to bring him. He came under the persuasive influence of a little force and gave a ready promise that as far as his influence would go the Japanese would not fish under 25 cents.

The Daily World also seemed apologetic when it explained to its readers that there was no violence on the night of 8 July when the Japanese returned from fishing: “There had been a good deal of talk of molesting the Japanese if they did not stand to the price of the Union, but when it came to the Japs going out last night no action was taken.” It insinuated that violence might have been employed if the numbers had been in the BCFU’s favour. “Besides, the Japanese outnumbered the whites, Indians and colored

82 “Provincial Legislature Opened With Brilliant Éclat at Victoria This Afternoon,” Vancouver Province, July 19, 1900, p1.
83 “Japs Own the River,” Vancouver Daily World, July 9, 1900, p5.
men from three or four to one. Then the Japs are reported to be armed." Race clearly was a key lens through which contemporary commentators recorded people's strike experiences. Arguing that factors other than race deserve a place in the history of the strike is not to suggest that white racism did not exist, but rather is to argue that the prevalent racism of the time did not entirely determine the dynamics of the strike.

1.4: Specials Arrive and Anderson Arrested

Understanding that the strike was not fought simply on racialized grounds is an especially important notion to keep in mind when considering the actions of the cannery owners. They were not in direct competition with Japanese, and therefore were less confrontational in their dealings with them. The canners acted, however, in their own self interest, and not as supporters of Japanese equality in BC. As indicated in the consul’s letter republished in Kobayashi, it was the canners’ connections within the provincial government that “ordered in police.” On 11 July, special constables were hired and rushed to Steveston in response to a wire sent the previous day to British Columbia’s Attorney General D.M. Eberts by the secretary of the Canners’ Association, W.A. Duncan:

> Strike amongst fishermen of Fraser River: riots and damage to property likely to result unless immediate and ample police protection afforded to men desirous of pursuing their lawful calling; armed strikers parading Steveston.  

The deputy attorney general, H.A. Maclean, got back to Duncan the very next day to assuage cannery owners’ fears. He informed Duncan that the government would send New Westminster Chief Constable R.B. Lister to Steveston, “to preserve order.” Badges were quickly sent to the waterfront so that Lister and Vancouver Constable Colin

84 “Japs Own the River,” Vancouver Daily World, July 9, 1900, p5. There is certainly some irony that on the day that the Daily World did not go to press the Province carried the report of the march through the Japanese housing district.

85 British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1005.

86 British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1005.
Campbell could continue hiring specials as they saw fit. In a few days they had forty-two men under their command. There was no question who they were there to serve. When asked how the specials affected his work, the Steveston Chief of Police, G.W Shay, described their presence in this way: “I understood they were sent to look after the canners, and the interests of the canners, and I paid no attention to them at all.”87 The publicly funded constables patrolled the water in cannery owned boats, often accompanied by cannery owners. That it is unconceivable that the BCFU or JFBS could have used government tools of authority and violence is a key aspect of this standoff. It is arguably this difference that has led to distinctions made in the community histories that classify the white cannery owners as helping the Japanese fishers, but the white union fishers as being their mortal enemies.

The rumours that sold newspapers were also having an effect in Victoria. That the Attorney General’s office was convinced that canneries were in serious danger and saw no need to check the key claim that “armed strikers” were marching through Steveston’s streets, is further evidenced in the back and forth wires with Lister on 11 July. The Chief Constable was instructed to “keep in telephone contact with R.A. Anderson, Stipendiary Magistrate, Vancouver, in case he should be required to read Riot Act, section 83 of Code.”88 When Lister’s reply was not immediately received, the Attorney General himself sent an anxious wire: “Why do you not report on situation at Steveston, as requested by my telegram? Most anxious to have full report immediately.”89 Lister’s eventual reply, which was apparently sent before seeing the Attorney General’s plea, carried none of the panic that the canners had promised. “All quiet here at present.”90 The canners’ access to state resources would be even more evident two weeks later when three Justices of the Peace with close cannery

87 British Columbia, *Calling Out Militia at Steveston*, clx.
89 British Columbia, *Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen*, 1006.
connections used their position to call in two hundred heavily armed militia forces without even requiring government approval.\footnote{As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the protocol for calling the militia was to get three Justices of the Peace to sign a requisition. In this case the three JPs were: M.B. Wilkinson, owner of the Dinsmore Cannery, Edward Hunt, a former partner in a cannery, and Robert Whiteside, foreman of the Pacific Coast Cannery.}

One of the Provincial Police’s first acts was to arrest J.L. Anderson, president of the Vancouver union, on charges of intimidation. The charges against Anderson were dismissed within twenty-four hours, but the failed arrest was still important public relations material. Multiple newspapers argued that Anderson's intimidation tactics were clear evidence that the majority of fishers wanted to go out and fish, but were prevented from doing so by so called “labour agitators” like Anderson, Rogers, and Will MacClain.\footnote{“Fishermen’s Strike,” Vancouver News Advertiser, July 12, 1900, 3.} The arrest demonstrates the ability of the canners to effect real results in the dispute by reporting rumours to the authorities. Constable Campbell reported directly to the Attorney General with an explanation of why the arrest had failed. The explanation is also revealing in regards to why Anderson had been singled out for arrest in the first place.

The case of Regina v. Anderson was one of intimidation, and there seemed to be sufficient evidence to make a good case, but after he had been arrested there was very little evidence. Anderson is looked upon as one of the leaders; he was tried in the City Police Court here and dismissed.\footnote{British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1008.}

It would not be the last time that “one of the leaders” of the BCFU was coincidentally arrested on the same night that forces were sent to Steveston to protect cannery interests; Rogers would be arrested at precisely the time that the militia was sent to Steveston on 23 July.\footnote{“Excitement at White Heat: Fishermen’s Strike Rapidly Approaching the Acute Stage,” Vancouver Province, July 23, 1900, p1.} These arrests are integral to understanding the context of Japanese experience in July 1900 as they concretely confirmed the connection that the
consul letter had claimed between police forces and the cannery owners. They served as a reminder that the labour dispute carried legal repercussions – but only for fishers who challenged the canners.

The canners were in regular contact with the Attorney General. The day after the special constables arrived, cannery owner J.H. Todd wired the Attorney General with a dire message from an informant who had attended a BCFU meeting and claimed that the fishers planned to burn down the canneries. “We are not easily frightened, but at the same time it is not pleasant to have such threats made and we believe some of the Union men are quite prepared to go to any extreme. Letters from our canneries last night report the situation as serious.” The canners were able to use official government channels and keep the ear of the Attorney General for actions they deemed “not pleasant” and for outlandish rumours that they “believed.”

The BCFU responded to Anderson’s arrest by releasing a statement calling for fishers to use nonviolent means to maintain solidarity. Two newspapers printed the full text of the union’s statement which, incidentally, also made further attempts to distance the BCFU from the provocative sign that was discussed above:

And whereas, the Fishermen’s union have printed no bills nor been a party to having any bills threatening in any way to do injury to life or limb to anybody and have no sympathy with those parties who are posting bills and believe that this is being done to create sympathy from the public against the fishermen, therefore, Be it resolved that this union views with regret and alarm the action of the canners in arresting Captain Anderson, and would urge all fishermen to refrain from all intimidation and violence, but to use all lawful means to keep men from fishing under the price.

The canners’ government connections demonstrated, however, that there were no such “lawful means.” The canners successfully used monetary bonds charged to members of

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95 British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1007.
96 “Fishermen’s Strike,” Vancouver Province, July 12, 1900, p8. The Daily World also printed the entire text of the fishermen’s labour resolution.
their combine to enforce a joint policy and eliminate competition, while also operating in a system that made fishers’ attempts to do the same an illegal form of intimidation. 97

1.5: “Foreign” in the Press & the JFBS Strike Demands

The word “foreign” was revealingly deployed differently for varying purposes in English language newspaper articles. In discussing the arrest of Anderson, the arrival of the special constables, and the release of the BCFU statement, all papers emphasized the perceived weakness of the Japanese fishers’ position and of their character. When newspaper writers wanted to negatively portray the BCFU leaders and ideas, they criticized them as being “foreign.” It was widely reported that the bulk of the strikers were not committed British Columbian fishers, but rather foreign agitators from the United States. Though no BC paper welcomed Japanese immigration or saw nationalized Japanese as actually “Canadian,” the Japanese were not included in the category of “foreign” under this line of reasoning. When discussing the Japanese as a weakness to Steveston fishers’ solidarity, however, the papers did categorize the Japanese fishers as “foreign.” So when the News Advertiser, supporting the decision to send in special police officers, agreed with the canners’ argument that most fishers preferred to fish for twenty cents, they noted that “bona fide” fishers and Japanese fishers felt it was a fair price, and that only foreign fishers and foreign agitators wanted twenty-five cents. 98 In contrast, the Province editorial of the same day blamed the “foreign” Japanese for the BCFU’s disadvantageous negotiating position. The Province’s editor gave no credence to the Japanese agreement to withhold their labour, claiming they would follow the fish:

97 In light of the bonds that small canneries were required to pay to the Canners’ Association in order to ensure they did not independently offer the fishers more than twenty cents, there is no shortage of irony in the reasoning that was reported for the canners’ need of the special constables. The Daily World and Province independently reported that unnamed canners complained that their staff refused to work after being visited by union officials – and that police were therefore needed to allow people the freedom to work at a price they determined was fair. “Special Police Sworn In,” Vancouver Daily World, July 11, 1900, 1; “Twenty Cents a Fish,” Vancouver Province, July 11, 1900, 1.

98 “Fishermen’s Strike,” Vancouver News Advertiser, July 12, 1900, p3.
The fishermen have to recognize the weakening effect on their side of the presence of so many Japanese. In the case of a sudden increase in the run of fish these foreigners might be irresistibly tempted to break away from the loose agreement which now exists between them and the white men.99

“Foreign” and “white” came to mean “agitator.” “Japanese” and “foreign” came to mean “weak and untrustworthy.” This situation was calamitous for the BCFU’s ability to control prices, the Province’s editor continued, reasoning that an agreement made with the Japanese would not be one by which “the canners would feel bound to abide.”100 The Daily World’s front page told readers that the Japanese would abandon the BCFU, a position they supported with reference to the opinion of Constable Lister, and claimed that the special constables were necessary to stop the violence this action would cause between the white and Japanese fishers.101 And the Victoria Daily Colonist told their readers that JFBS-BCFU cooperation was not possible in the long term because, “it is not thought that the Japs will keep their promises.”102

The Japanese fishers’ return to the water was not, however, a foregone conclusion. It was not a case of bowing to pressure from canneries or betraying the BCFU, but rather one of attempting to find a solution they saw as in their own interests as conditions evolved. That the press regularly predicted that they would return early, and that they did in fact return before the BCFU, is not proof that the Japanese always intended to break the strike. The following is Kobayashi’s recording of a presentation made by JFBS president Iwakichi Shimamura, and JFBS secretary Yasushi Yamada, at a meeting with three BCFU executives on 10 July. It indicates that the JFBS were willing to support the twenty-five cent campaign, but only if their demands were met:

There are 4,000 Japanese here engaged in the fishing industry. At the start of the fishing season this class of people came here like an

100 “The Fishery Complications,” (editorial), Vancouver Province, July 12, 1900, p4.
101 “Special Police Sworn In,” Vancouver Daily World, July 11, 1900, p1.
When this white fishermen’s strike happened, we felt that from our perspective we needed to show sympathy with the white fishermen. Because of this [sympathetic action of not fishing] our food payments were cut by the canneries. And so because of this we cannot strike [under the current conditions]. If the strike is to continue, for its duration, we would like to be supplied by the white union the amount required to cover our food expenses. If this cannot be done, we will go out fishing for less than 25 cents per fish. Otherwise we cannot deal with our current emergency.\textsuperscript{103}

The simple conclusion that the Japanese went back as strikebreakers at the “canners’ price” fails to take into account this much more nuanced negotiation. The events of July 1900 demonstrated not that the canners could name any price they wanted and have the Japanese fishers jump to their command, but rather that the JFBS was able to successfully force the canners to pay a price that they felt was fair, or at least liveable. That the BCFU and the JFBS were not able to successfully work together to demand more than twenty cents from their employers does not compel the conclusion that Japanese held no negotiating power or had no clear idea of what price they believed was functional/supportable. The newspapers of July 1900 repeatedly used the Japanese as evidence that the canners would successfully force the BCFU back to work. Implicit in these claims was the assumption that the Japanese did what they were told by the “white men.” As this chapter shows, however, there is little to support this view other than stereotypes of Japanese as subservient to authority on which the newspaper accounts of 1900 were clearly based.

\textsuperscript{103} Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 87. [translated by author]
Chapter 2: One Monster, Two Clashes.

Table 2: Timeline of Events (July 12th to 20th, 1900)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>JFBS &amp; BCFU agree to catch 300 sockeye per day for food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th</td>
<td>“Monster” BCFU Procession downtown Vancouver ends with anti-Japanese speeches.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15th</td>
<td>First clash between cannery fishers and BCFU patrols outside the Albion Cannery.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17th</td>
<td>NWFU go out fishing for the day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th</td>
<td><em>Vancouver Province</em> newspaper censures BCFU leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th</td>
<td>North Arm fishers go out fishing for the day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th</td>
<td>Second clash between cannery fishers and BCFU patrols leads to public abuse of fisher George Brown by the BCFU at Mackie’s Wharf. Canners and the press call loudly for military presence in Steveston.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the number of special constables in Steveston steadily increased, so did the number of sockeye in the Fraser River. And with some eight thousand fishers not fishing, the tension steadily increased as well. The JFBS and the BCFU started a system of fishing for food where each took up to three hundred fish a day on the agreement that these fish could not be sold to the canneries. All was not well between the JFBS and BCFU, however. The BCFU organized a “monster” procession on 14 July that saw thousands lining the street in a party like atmosphere, only to end with speeches that included overtly xenophobic messages aimed at the Japanese. As well, undermining the image that the procession displayed of unified “white” labour, groups of “white” fishers in New Westminster and on the North Arm defied the BCFU strike action and sold their fish to the canneries for less than the union rate. The canners were not inactive, either. On
two occasions they sent out small fishing vessels to prompt a response from the BCFU patrols. On both occasions they were successful in sparking a violent exchange. In the second such instance the canners were able to goad the BCFU leadership into a confrontation that led ultimately to an increased military presence in the fishing village.\textsuperscript{104}

This chapter discusses the most confrontational days of the strike: 12 to 20 July. It builds on the argument developed in the previous chapter that the common historical narrative of the strike, by relying on newspapers for un-contextualized factual reference, has developed a distorted image of events; this chapter demonstrates that prevalent newspaper rumours of racial violence from July 1900 have entered into the historical narrative and have overshadowed actual events. This chapter also continues the argument that this confrontation was not only about race; examples from Kobayashi and provincial government documents demonstrate that the events of the strike were at least in part a reflection of the canners’ ability to impose their vision for the industry on the racialized labour force through their privileged access to the province’s resources. The events of this chapter bring into sharper focus the intensely racist sentiment within the labour movement that was directed at the Japanese in particular. This chapter argues, however, that the notion of Japanese as being a homogeneous category is misleading as there were significant differences in income and influence levels within this community, and that the racism of the BCFU and the cannery owners was experienced differently by Japanese on either side of this divide.

2.1: The “Monster”

Rumours traveled quickly from the streets of Steveston to desks in Victoria and to newsstands in Vancouver. On Friday, 13 July, Constable Lister alerted the Attorney General’s office by telegram that there were “rumours of trouble tonight; Sunday night may bring strike to a crisis; am prepared for any trouble; twenty specials.”\textsuperscript{105} The News Advertiser reported this as a near certainty – the very same day – claiming that the

\textsuperscript{104} Ralston, “The 1900 Strike,” 128.
\textsuperscript{105} British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1007.
Japanese would go out en masse to fish on Sunday evening (15 July), and that the canners expected “50-75 per cent [sic] of the men” to follow them.\footnote{“The Salmon Fisheries: Deadlock Continues – Fishermen Not Altogether Unanimous in Their Demands,” \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser}, July 13, 1900, p8.} The \textit{Province} emphasized the potential for danger, claiming that the situation was “now rapidly approaching a climax,” but also noted that the JFBS representatives, while calling for a quick end to the strike, promised “to wait a little while longer before taking any action.”\footnote{“International Concessions: White and Japanese Fishermen Inclined to Act in Unison,” \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 13, 1900, p4.} The \textit{Daily Columbian} went ever further claiming that “the Japs and white fishermen seemed likely to come to armed conflict” that could well result in “loss of life.”\footnote{“Trouble on the River,” \textit{New Westminster Daily Columbian}, July 11, 1900, p2; “The Fisheries Trouble,” \textit{New Westminster Daily Columbian}, July 12, 1900, p2.} With so much build up the strike was such big news that the \textit{Province} made space on its Saturday front page – a page half covered by a caricature of weekly events – for an article notifying readers that nothing had happened: “no further developments in the fishing troubles on the Fraser. No boats have yet gone out, but everything is quiet.”\footnote{“Quiet on the Fraser,” \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 14, 1900, p1.} The strike took a prominent position in the caricature as well; two bow-legged, long moustached, racialized depictions of Japanese fishers were drawn above the words, “Fishermen stood firm.”\footnote{“The Week In Caricature,” \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 14, 1900, p1. [Appendix I] This is the only time that the paper referred to Japanese when using the term “fishermen” – a term exclusively reserved for white fishers unless qualified by the adjective “Japanese.”} [See Appendix I]

Despite these ominous predictions, no return to the water occurred – except under the terms of an agreement made at a BCFU meeting attended by a few JFBS representatives. Both groups agreed that fishers would be able to go out and fish for their own food consumption as long as they flew a white (JFBS) or red (BCFU) flag to indicate their intentions. The maximum daily catch for each group was set at three
hundred fish per day, although this number varies by source.\textsuperscript{111} In contrast to the common narrative that polarizes the fishers into racialized camps, this example indicates that the JFBS and BCFU were able – at times – to negotiate terms and work together. As the need for differently coloured flags indicates, however, the JFBS and the BCFU were not entirely comfortable teammates. Even in situations where their goals were similar, both sides felt the need to separately identify themselves as white or Japanese.

On Saturday afternoon, 14 July, the BCFU organized a march in downtown Vancouver. While the press would give a much larger Japanese procession eight days later almost no coverage, this BCFU march was previewed and reviewed extensively.\textsuperscript{112} Papers discussed the planning of it, noted its central route, reviewed the events and speeches, and used the word "monster" to describe it.\textsuperscript{113} Reports differed in terms of numbers, ranging from the \textit{Daily Colonist}'s claim of “458 whites, Indians and negroes but no Japanese,” to the \textit{Province}'s higher estimate of three full columns of orderly marchers “over a thousand strong.”\textsuperscript{114} While even the high estimate makes this procession just a quarter of the size of the later Japanese procession, the \textit{Province} allotted more space to

\textsuperscript{111} The \textit{Province} reported a limit of six to seven hundred on 13 July, and then a limit of three hundred on 16 July: “International Concessions: White and Japanese Fishermen Inclined to Act in Unison,” \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 13, 1900, p4; “Fishermen are Firm,” \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 16, 1900, p3.

\textsuperscript{112} This point is not to condemn the press’s choice of coverage so much as it is an indication of what experiences the newspapers of July 1900 can be used for as an effective historical source. The difference in coverage largely reflects the readership and access to the press – as well as the fact that this march needed careful planning and promoting as getting to downtown Vancouver would have been a considerable journey for most people involved. The JFBS march, on the other hand, was of a more spontaneous nature, and took place next to the living quarters of all the Japanese fishers. Even the Special Committee that inquired into the calling of the militia was not clear on the details of the Japanese march. The Japanese march seems to have failed to make an impression on white media and white government. This, however, is not evidence that it failed to have an impact on the lives of the Japanese fishers who marched and on those who watched.


describing the jovial atmosphere this day than they would spend discussing the entire Japanese march eight days later.

The Port Simpson band was discoursing all kinds of marches and rag-time music at the head of a long line with their drum major, in a uniform that would put a German admiral out of business, swung his baton and blew his whistle in a more artistic way.\footnote{Fishermen are Firm,} \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 16, 1900, p3. The newspapers of 1900 use the phrase, “Port Simpson Indian Band.” In all references that are not direct quotations I have used the phrase “Port Simpson Lax Kw’alaams First Nation.”

The fishers walked boisterously through downtown Vancouver, moving east along Cordova to Westminster (now Main Street), south to Hastings, west to Carrall, and north back to Cordova where they continued west to Cambie until they came to a stop at the courthouse on the corner of Hastings Street.\footnote{Fishermen are Firm,} \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 16, 1900, p3; Teiji Kobayashi, 35 \textit{Nen Shi}, 90,91.

With the \textit{Province}’s cheerful description of events came a report that was extremely sympathetic to the fishers – and to labour in general; a position that is surprising in retrospect, as just three days later the paper became extremely critical of all actions of the BCFU. In fact, by the end of July, the BCFU was so frustrated with the coverage in the \textit{Province} that they organized a boycott of the paper.\footnote{Formally Ratified,} \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 31, 1900, p1. On this day, however, the \textit{Province} laid out the BCFU position with sympathy, noting that their demands were “not outrageous” and that the union was only seeking, “a friendly compromise, but wanted to be treated like men.” The paper then did something that the canners refused to do; they acknowledged the legitimacy of the BCFU: “They had their duly accredited officers and representatives in their union, and only through them could they be approached by the cannery owners.”\footnote{Fishermen are Firm,} \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 16, 1900, p3.

The jovial nature of the march stands in stark contrast to the content of the speeches that a large crowd gathered to hear when the parade stopped in front of the

\footnote{Fishermen are Firm,} \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 16, 1900, p3. The newspapers of 1900 use the phrase, “Port Simpson Indian Band.” In all references that are not direct quotations I have used the phrase “Port Simpson Lax Kw’alaams First Nation.”

\footnote{Fishermen are Firm,} \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 16, 1900, p3; Teiji Kobayashi, 35 \textit{Nen Shi}, 90,91.

\footnote{Formally Ratified,} \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 31, 1900, p1.

\footnote{Fishermen are Firm,} \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 16, 1900, p3.
Vancouver Courthouse. This contrast, however, was not noted in the newspapers. The depth of anti-Asian sentiment among newspaper reporters and their audience is notable in the absence of comment or concern regarding the content of the speeches. Former BCFU secretary, Joseph Watson, started things off by emphasizing to the crowd that the standoff was about union recognition, but subsequent speakers focused on attacking the Japanese. The union’s president, J.L. Anderson, used racialized notions of decency to argue, “that it was necessary for the fishermen to obtain the price they asked if they were to support their families and live as white people should.” A Mr. Burns then argued that the presence of the Japanese was of much broader importance than the struggle with the canners: “If the fishermen were worsted in the present struggle, it would lead to fresh importations of Japs by the canners, who would then not reduce the price to 20 cents, but cut it down to 15 cents or even lower.” The lowering of the price paid to the fishers in mid-season – during the highest run periods – was a consistent strategy of the capitalist cannery owners. Burns’ blaming of the Japanese for this was a conflation of his two perceived opponents, the Japanese and the cannery owners. And as the Japanese had played a role in raising the price from fifteen to twenty cents as described in the previous chapter, his comments are not without irony. Burns did not limit his attack to the fisheries, however. He argued that they were on the frontline of a battle that all “white” labour would soon face, and called on other unions around the province to support the BCFU. Seeing the presence of the Japanese fishers as part of the capitalist owners’ strategy, Burns argued that the BCFU “were involved in a struggle with the capitalistic class, against whom other branches of labor might at any time find themselves arrayed.” As the fishing season was short, Burns reasoned, other capitalists in other industries would soon be using these very same Japanese to drive down wages in other industries.

121 “The Fishermen’s Strike,” Vancouver News Advertiser, July 15, 1900, p8. Note that this is another example of the criticism discussed above in footnote 58.
Chief Kelly of the Port Simpson Lax Kw’alaams First Nation also used the podium to openly challenge the presence of Asian immigrants in British Columbia. He went on the offensive against the Japanese fishers in particular, and Asian immigration more generally. Provincial Constable Colin Campbell later recalled the Chief’s speech being especially provocative with regard to the Japanese: “He said that if the Japs went out well, we know what we will do with them; and afterwards he said, in a jocular way, that he had the strength of five or six men.”122 The News Advertiser reported that Kelly “had no use for” immigrant residents from Japan or China, and would not support any person in government who did. “Incidentally the Chief reminded his hearers [sic] that he was a voter and would never vote for a Japanese representative. The Chief’s remarks were loudly applauded.”123

Considering the large number of speeches that attacked the presence of Japanese residents in the province, it is somewhat surprising that Kobayashi’s account offers little discussion of this event. His narrative notes only the route of the march, that Anderson had been released, that the speeches were well received, and that the BCFU “gathered donations of bread, potatoes, etc. And they collected donations of $300 cash - the procession was a success.”124 The ease with which the press printed anti-Japanese statements on this day and other days – before and after the strike – and Kobayashi’s lack of discussion of the speeches, are perhaps best understood as an indication of how widespread and public anti-Asian sentiments were in the lower mainland at the time.

122 British Columbia, Calling Out Militia at Steveston, clxvi.
124 Teiji Kobayashi, 35 Nen Shi, 90-91. [translated by author]
2.2: “Antagonistic Forces” Clash

Even though the Japanese did not go out fishing on the night of Sunday, 15 July, the *Province* was able to report violence on the water in its Monday morning edition: “The first clash between the antagonistic forces is reported to have occurred on the river itself during last night.” The clash was not, however, the one that the press had been building up between the Japanese and white fishers. Instead, the antagonistic forces were white labour and white capital. In what appears to have been an attempt to test BCFU resolve, the Albion cannery sent out a boat in full view of the union patrols. The patrol boat approached the Albion vessel, pulled up its nets, and started to tow it away. They had not towed it very far, however, when a cannery steamship challenged the action. When the BCFU patrol rebuffed demands for the release of the fishers and their boat, the steamer charged the union patrol. The steamer sent up a large enough wake to swamp the small fishing boat and to send the two union fishers overboard.

The *Daily World* retold the events in much more sensational fashion under the headline, “A Boat Cut in Two.” One key detail in this version was that “A white man and a Japanese had gone out and were fishing off the sandheads.” After describing the chase on the water, the *Daily World* reported a much more serious collision than the *Province*, claiming that the steamer lost control, slammed into the fishing boat, cut it into separate pieces, and forced the two fishers into the water. In a rare case of cooperation, the cannery employees and the striking fishers are reported to have worked together to get the men out of the water. The two rescued fishers then returned to shore on the cannery steamer.

Although the event made an impression on newspaper sellers, it did not seem to worry the provincial police. Constable F.R. Murray felt his presence was no longer needed, and he sent a telegram to the Attorney General to tell him as much. “Everything

125 “Fishermen are Firm,” *Vancouver Province*, July 16, 1900, p3.
126 “Fishermen are Firm,” *Vancouver Province*, July 16, 1900, p3.
quiet; no settlement yet; do not expect trouble; special patrolling night and day has good
effect; think not necessary for me to remain; wire reply.”129 The Attorney General’s quick
reply affirmed the lack of worry: “Please return to Victoria today’s ‘Islander.’”130 In the
report of the special committee formed to investigate the necessity of the calling of the
militia after the strike, this clash was not mentioned. Still, the press attention it received
demonstrated how strike confrontations offered exciting, if exaggerated, headlines. The
headlines focused on building up tension between the Japanese and white fishers, but
as this example indicates, that is not necessarily where the tension lay. There was not
always tension at all – and this is something that is not evident in the prevailing narrative
of the strike. The event, if seen as nothing serious at the time, was a precursor for a
scuffle five days later that would have much more serious consequences for the fishing
village.

The Daily World’s detail of a Japanese fisher working together with a white
cannery fisher – whether accurate or not – is important for the very fact that it was
mentioned. It is another indication that Japanese made individual choices that cannot be
merely summarized as “Japanese.” That the report required no back story or explanation
of these fishers working together indicated it was not a shocking event; crossing the
racialized divide of the JFBS and BCFU was not news in itself. Numerous historians
have noted that Frank Rogers, as a socialist, attempted to organize fishers as a whole
without reference to racialized distinctions, and to resist the canners as a single group of
fishers – not as white fishers or Japanese fishers.131 Ralston’s work indicates that
Rogers achieved some success in Vancouver – before July – but that the NWFU
remained resolutely racist. The press of July 1900 reflects the divisions at the
organizational level – the BCFU, the JFBS, the NWFU – more than the earlier failed
attempts at labour unity. The JFBS was understandably sceptical of advances from

129 British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1009.
130 British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1009.
131 See for example: Ralston, “The 1900 Strike,” 102; Roy, A White Man’s Province, 144; Nicol, “A
Working Man’s Dream,” 3; Ward, White Canada Forever, 102; Phillips, No Power Greater,
35; Morton, Working People, 56.
white labour in a society that took white privilege for granted. This, however, makes the individual instances of co-operation all the more remarkable.

2.3: The Province Turns Against the BCFU

The tone of the English language press reports changed as the strike progressed. As July moved into its third week, the reporting became increasingly critical of the BCFU. This was seen most clearly in the Province – the same paper that had spoken positively of the union goals after the “monster” procession. It is important here for two reasons. First, it affected the production of key historical documents from which this event has been pieced together, and second because the Province’s initial rebuke of the BCFU included important evidence about divisions in the Japanese community.

The turn in support occurred suddenly on 18 July, the day after the newspaper had printed statements that were phoned in by union president J.L. “Captain” Anderson. Among Anderson’s claims was that the vice president of the JFBS, Kamekichi Ohki, had made an investment of $15,000 in the Lighthouse Cannery and was willing to use his influence to offer fishers twenty-five cents per fish. The Province then spent nearly half of its strike update the following day retracting this statement and distancing itself from Anderson. It reported that it had received a call from the Lighthouse and been told that Anderson’s story was “an absolute falsehood.” It then offered the following:

As a purveyor of unreliable reports Captain Anderson appears to be unexcelled. This is not the first time he has handed in misleading items. Just what object he has in view by the perpetration of such frauds is for him to say.

This rebuke of Anderson marked a change in the Province’s attitude towards the BCFU, and the paper increasingly came to mirror the anti-union sentiments of the News

133 “Canners Will Confer,” Vancouver Province, July 17, 1900, p8.
134 “Have Come Together: Canners and Fishermen in Amiable Conference,” Vancouver Province, July 18, 1900, p3.
Advertiser and the Victoria Daily Colonist. In contrast to the effective use of rumour in telegrams to the Attorney General by the Canners’ Association that had resulted in the government agreeing to send Provincial Police forces, this far less provocative yet wholly false rumour met with entirely different results. The paper would go on to question the validity of the BCFU’s statistical evidence, noting that if there were no money in fishing, no one would fish. It then described the BCFU leadership as “men who are lacking in every qualification for leadership,” who were looking to prolong the strike to avoid having “to go to work with something else than their jaws.” It produced a full banner headline that called MacClain a “demagogue,” and referred to Rogers’ leadership as the “dictatorship of a blatant and injudicious blatherskite.” Though rumours and unconfirmed reports would form much of the English language news reports throughout the strike, only the BCFU faced this type of retributive attack in the published pages. As references to newspapers have made up the foundation of the strike histories, the negative image of the BCFU leadership in Japanese-Canadian histories is partly a reflection of the contemporary press’s efforts to discredit them.

Kamekichi Ohki, who Anderson had slandered, was a house boss. As such, he was one of a small number of Japanese who worked with the canneries to hire Japanese fishers. House bosses acted as liaisons between two groups that would otherwise have had a great deal of trouble communicating. Although community historians such as Fukawa, Marlatt, and Yesaki speak positively of the role of the house bosses, scattered evidence suggests their role deserves some reconsideration. Though ostensibly in the best interests of all Japanese fishers, this relationship allowed

136 “Indians are Fishing,” Vancouver Province, July 27, 1900, p6.
137 “A Demagogue’s Incendiary Talk,” Vancouver Province, July 26, 1900, p1; “Formally Ratified,” Vancouver Province, July 31, 1900, p1.
138 I have chosen the term “house boss” to describe individuals that the Japanese language constitution of the JFBS refers to as “bossu” (ボス).
139 See for example: Yesaki, Sutebusuton, 13; Marlatt, Steveston Recollected, 11; Fukawa, Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet, 50.
house bosses to make considerable profits off of their bo-i (“boys”).

Knight and Koizumi’s interviews with Ryuichi Yoshida indicate that by 1919 house bosses’ abuse of power to make substantial profits had come to be controversial in the larger Japanese immigrant community. While no direct evidence exists of this happening to the same degree in 1900, there is enough evidence to suggest that characterizations of the house boss system as being simply “a mutual benefit to the boss, the fishermen and the cannery owners,” or claims that “[a]ll participants benefited from the fishing unit system,” are overstated. More importantly, these characterizations are misleading in a way that again portrays the events of July 1900 as only being a racial faceoff between white and Japanese fishers. It downplays the role of the canners in this dispute by presuming that the Japanese fishers had a single interest and that that interest was at odds only with the white fishers.

The Lighthouse Cannery’s statement that was printed in the Province’s admonition of Anderson indicated how closely the house bosses worked with the canneries. “The Japanese Okie [sic], is stationed at the cannery in the capacity of contractor and is allowed to have an office in which to conduct his business as secretary of the Japanese union.” Although the canners outright refused to recognize fishing unions throughout the strike, and refused to meet with union leaders who were not “bona fide” fishers, the JFBS, which was not a labour union, was granted office space in the Lighthouse Cannery. JFBS records indicate that bosses were affiliated with other canneries as well, although it is unclear to what degree they were actually afforded office space.

All the house bosses that led the JFBS were fishers, but they were also

The term bo-i ("boys") is not included as hyperbole, but rather is the actual term used in the 1900 constitution of the Japanese Fishermen’s Benevolent Society to define the relationship between members with status and those without.


Fukawa, Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet, 50; Yesaki, Sutebusuton, 13.

“Have Come Together: Canners and Fishermen in Amiable Conference,” Vancouver Province, July 18, 1900, p3.

“Regulations of the Japanese Fishermen’s Benevolent Society of Fraser River, 1900,” reprinted in Teiji Kobayashi, 35 Nen Shi, 69 [Article 7].
managers of other fishers and closely connected to the cannery owners’ interests in ways that labour union leaders could not be without admitting conflict of interest. While this does not lessen the impact of the JFBS as negotiators, it indicates that the power they wielded in negotiation may have been predominantly in the interests of a very small percentage of the Japanese community in Steveston; it would have been difficult for a person in such a position to bargain against the interests of the canners to get the best deal for the fishers they supposedly represented. Based on Yesaki’s data, house bosses were able to make six times more money than bo-i on fishing income alone.\textsuperscript{145} This does not account for other income – which was also made on the backs of the bo-i. As Yesaki explains: “Fishing bosses also benefited financially by lodging their crews in bunkhouses and receiving payment for room and board, as well as for laundry services and sundry items.”\textsuperscript{146} Considering that these bosses also negotiated with the canners, the house boss relationship was clearly of primary benefit to the bosses, and should not be viewed simply as one of “mutual benefit” as the terms of the relationship included very little ability for the bo-i to have a significant voice in the relationship; the terms did, however, provide ample opportunity for bosses to make considerable profits.

This view of the house boss - bo-i relationship is supported by the JFBS constitution. It indicates that at its heart the relationship was one of inequality and economic hierarchy. One and a half percent of bo-i wages went to the house boss – with wages and deductions being calculated by the house boss.\textsuperscript{147} House bosses were connected to specific canneries, and bo-i were required to be loyal to that same cannery to the degree that they were required to notify their house boss if they dealt with any other cannery.\textsuperscript{148} In the event of a dispute over prices, a coordinated and unified JFBS strategy was required, but there were no provisions in the constitution to include the

\textsuperscript{145} Yesaki, \textit{Sutebusuton}, 14.
\textsuperscript{146} Yesaki, \textit{Sutebusuton}, 14.
\textsuperscript{147} “Regulations of the Japanese Fishermen’s Benevolent Society of Fraser River, 1900,” reprinted in Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 76,77 [Articles 65, 67].
\textsuperscript{148} “Regulations of the Japanese Fishermen’s Benevolent Society of Fraser River, 1900,” reprinted in Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 68,69 [Articles 5, 7].
voices of the *bo-i* in deciding this strategy.\(^{149}\) While partially understandable, as the JFBS was a benevolent society and not a labour union, the primary relationship that this document seems to protect is that between the house boss and the cannery.

The house bosses also protected their relationship with the canneries through their leadership roles in the JFBS. The JFBS leadership disseminated information to their membership through official meetings. Although the JFBS was negotiating terms with the cannery association, Kobayashi’s documents suggest that they promoted the Cannery Association’s views to their membership and spoke negatively of the BCFU at these meetings. An anonymous diary entry indicates that JFBS leaders used at least one meeting to present the views of the cannery’s association as being beneficial to Japanese fishers as a whole, and criticized the logic and character of the BCFU leadership.

July 18: Today in the new [JFBS] hospital there was a general meeting in which there was discussion of whether to return to fish for twenty cents or not – and there was some time for consultation on this matter. In any event it was decided that nets would not be lowered for less than 20 cents per fish. Mr. Mikuni explained that the three characters leading the white union were barely connected to the fishing business and that is why they could say [unreasonable] things such as the cannery would pay more than twenty cents per fish.\(^{150}\)

While it is not surprising that the JFBS differed with the BCFU’s price demand – as has been discussed at length above – it is notable that Mikuni’s reasoning is in verbatim agreement with the message that the cannery was promoting in the press.\(^{151}\) The difference in interest of house bosses and fishers is ignored and the cannery’s position is passed to the JFBS membership as if it were common sense, with the important privilege of official sanction from JFBS leadership. The cannery’s ability to use

\(^{149}\) “Regulations of the Japanese Fishermen’s Benevolent Society of Fraser River, 1900,” reprinted in Teiji Kobayashi, *35 Nen Shi*, 68 [Article 5].

\(^{150}\) Teiji Kobayashi, *35 Nen Shi*, 89-90. [translated by author]

connections afforded them by capital accumulation were expanded here to include an indirect yet effective channel to the Japanese fishers.

Community histories indicate that in 1900 the number of bo-i per house boss ranged from twenty to fifty. While Yesaki notes that this afforded house bosses a chance to look for investment opportunities, it also further separates their experiences and their economic realities from those of the bo-i. The necessity of the white-flagged fish-for-food system (discussed above) indicates that rather than looking for capital returns, the bo-i were increasingly living hand to mouth during the strike. The house bosses’ financial gains and ability to influence the industry are success stories, but they also indicate that negotiations with the canners and the BCFU, and information dissemination to the JFBS membership, did not reflect the interests of a group that can be simply labelled “Japanese,” or “nikkei,” or “issei” as a whole, but rather a sub-group of all of these: Japanese house bosses. As the house bosses dealt directly with the canners, the canners’ ability to use provincial resources to their advantage becomes an important yet overlooked element of Japanese fishers’ experience, and history.

The sources consulted here overwhelmingly indicate that racialized identity was important and much discussed in the Japanese community. However, it is apparent that there were distinct differences within this community, and that to speak of a generalized “Japanese experience” is to privilege the experiences of those who were in positions of power in the JFBS. This division is not brought up to downplay the racialized tension in BC or the discrimination faced by the Japanese; rather, it indicates that viewing such discrimination as affecting everyone in the Japanese community equally is misleading. Although sources do not allow for discussion of details of the lives of individual fishers, understanding that this divide existed allows us to temper generalizations of Japanese experience. To see the Japanese community in Steveston as a single entity – or as being of a single mind – is to follow the same stereotypes as the newspapers of 1900 that were discussed in the last chapter; yet as Nunoda has pointed out, this happens

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consistently in Japanese-Canadian histories.\textsuperscript{154} It is also important to acknowledge divides in the community because doing so opens the possibility that some in the Japanese community benefitted financially from the tensions surrounding the strike – and that the proposed solution to the strike would have had more financial benefit for house bosses than fishers.\textsuperscript{156} Also, in the diary entry discussed above, the BCFU leaders are not criticized for being racist, but rather for being unfamiliar with the fishing industry. I do not want to sympathize with the racism in the BCFU by making this point. Instead, my intention is to argue that both the Canners’ Association and the BCFU had racist views; portraying the strike as a racial standoff between fishers gives the canners, whose motivations were based on profit, undue credit as resisters of contemporary racism simply by making them the opponents of the racist white fishers.

2.4: The Clash that “Both” Sides Wanted

New Westminster and North Arm fishers separately broke ranks with the BCFU and went out fishing for a day each on 17 and 19 July. Further indicating that the contemporary newspapers cannot be used as an unchallenged resource, these events barely garnered attention, with only the \textit{News Advertiser} and the \textit{Province} even mentioning them – and only in passing. The events of July 1900 were often secondary to editorial discussions on such issues as categorizing the people involved; categories that were not only racialized. In this instance, the difference between “bona fide” fishers (i.e. white fishers), Japanese fishers, and union troublemakers (i.e. the BCFU leadership) was more important than the happenings on the water.\textsuperscript{156} The editors argued that all “bona fide” fishers would be happily working if not for the influence of men like Anderson, MacClain and Rogers, and the Japanese fishers – who were characterized as an “unfortunate complication” – were said to be in desperate conditions and ready to break the deadlock by returning en masse.\textsuperscript{157} The only thing for the BCFU to do was to cut a


\textsuperscript{155} This will be discussed further in Chapter 3, section 3.2.

\textsuperscript{156} Of the three leaders of the BCFU, only Anderson was a fisher.

deal with the canners as quickly as possible. If they persisted with their twenty-five cent demand, the Japanese would bring the prices down to an unacceptable level.\textsuperscript{158} The events of 17 and 19 July were two rare instances of fishers defying the BCFU; there is no question that a number of fishers were unwilling to fight a protracted labour struggle. But the actions of these dissenting fishers were far from Steveston and non-violent. Without violent confrontations there were no headlines and these actions were quickly forgotten. But these were the actions of frustrated fishers who did not support the BCFU's campaign for twenty-five cents and wanted to stop arguing with the canners and start fishing. While demanding the BCFU use “bona fide” fishers to negotiate, the press ignored the actual dissenting actions of bona fide fishers. The night after the North Arm events, however, on 20 July, the canners successfully created a headline-making confrontation that they then used to justify a call to the British Columbia Regiment. Many in the press accepted without question the canners’ actions as proof that the leaders of the BCFU were making money prolonging the strike by blocking bona fide fishers from making their honourable living.

On the evening of 20 July, two fishing boats left the docks of the Phoenix Cannery, and aimed to throw out their nets in full view of the BCFU patrols. Two cannery tugboats, manned with special constables, followed closely behind them. Lister testified afterward that the canners had purposefully acted to test the BCFU, while Rogers attested that he knew of this plan and “wanted to test if these people had the power to call out the Militia on such a trifling question as that.”\textsuperscript{159} When the fishers threw out their nets, the confrontation that both the canners and the BCFU seemed to want began. As many as eight union patrol boats, ten men to a boat, converged on the area, and either by force or by verbal persuasion, succeeded in having the nets pulled up. The BCFU then took control of one boat, while the special constables took control of the other.\textsuperscript{160} The BCFU patrols seized more than just a fishing boat, however. They also captured

\textsuperscript{158} “The Fishery Dispute (editorial),” \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 20, 1900, p4.
\textsuperscript{159} British Columbia, \textit{Calling Out Militia at Steveston}, clxii, clxxvii.
George Brown, one of the cannery fishers.\footnote{161} With Brown aboard, the patrols returned to Mackie’s Wharf in Steveston, and publicly and physically abused and ridiculed Brown.

The events on the water and at Mackie’s Wharf led to a number of telegrams between Victoria and Steveston. The telegrams indicate the extent to which the police force was answering to the cannery association. Lister and the specials under his command became targets of cannery owner fury. Prominent cannery owner D. Bell-Irving notified the Attorney General “police unable to cope with situation; position very serious; … unless prompt and adequate measures taken, life and property in great danger; Pinkerton’s agent considers situation most serious; consider specials useless.”\footnote{162} The Canners’ Association and Vancouver Board of Trade (VBT) separately telegraphed Premier Dunsmuir the next day with much the same message. The Canners’ Association labelled the special police as “utterly useless” noting that this was largely due to their being “unarmed and inexperienced.” The cannery made their demands very specific: “militia urgently required, or great loss of life and property will result; many men desirous and intending to fish; when they start, serious riot will begin.”\footnote{163} The VBT’s telegram also claimed that the militia was needed to protect “British subjects.” Their pleas, however, were concerned with capitalist profit and not humanitarian aid.

\begin{quote}
It having been represented to this Board that a state of lawlessness at present exists on the Fraser River, and that British subjects, desiring to carry on their lawful occupation as fishermen are intimidated and prevented by force from doing so; therefore be it Resolved, That this Board request the Provincial Government to take immediate steps for the
\end{quote}

\footnote{161} This is not the same “Mr. Brown” whose speeches were discussed in the previous section.\footnote{162} British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1009. Note that Bell-Irving openly admits that the cannery had hired an American detective from an agency specializing in quashing labour unions. The cannery were free of the criticism they successfully aimed at the fishers; fishers supporting the strike were labelled as “foreign” agitators, and as discussed in the previous chapter, foreign meant American. Meanwhile, the cannery were openly using an American agency to thwart “Canadian” labour solidarity, an issue that did not once make it into the press.\footnote{163} British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1010.
full protection of life and property, present measures being entirely inadequate to deal with the situation.\textsuperscript{164}

Their reference to “British subjects” is notable as it clearly includes approximately half of the Japanese fishers who were naturalized Canadians.\textsuperscript{165} Considering this plea an attempt by the canners to protect the Japanese is to seriously miscategorise the events, and to assign the cannery owners an undeservedly sympathetic role in this ordeal.\textsuperscript{166} As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, the events that led to the militia’s entrance, the alarmingly undemocratic, capital-friendly protocol that enabled their deployment, and the calculated confrontation that was used as justification for their entrance are key aspects of the standoff.

The telegrams had a significant effect. The Attorney General was upset with Lister. “Canners report you are not affording protection to fishermen willing to work. Why are you in Vancouver? Report fully how outrage last night occurred, and what precautions were taken to prevent it; wire immediately full report.” Lister defended his actions noting that, “[u]ntil last evening there has been no sign of disturbance on the streets of this town.” He refused to take any responsibility for calling in the militia, but he did state that if the Japanese planned to go out fishing, “it is almost certain that a large element of the Union will go out to intimidate and prevent others fishing.” He ended his letter by informing the Attorney General that he would make preparations with Stipendiary Magistrate to be present in case the Riot Act were needed.\textsuperscript{167} While Lister’s account could well include a degree of downplaying the violence to save face, his relatively calm assessment of the situation was not an attempt to side with the fishers. In

\textsuperscript{164} British Columbia, \textit{Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen}, 1010.

\textsuperscript{165} To gain a fishing licence Japanese had to become naturalized Canadians. For every boat that had a licenced fisher, there was also a boat puller, who did not need to be licenced or naturalized. Ralston, “The 1900 Strike,” 84-85.

\textsuperscript{166} See for example: Barman, \textit{The West Beyond the West}, 215.

\textsuperscript{167} British Columbia, \textit{Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen}, 1011.
fact, his correspondence betrayed his feeling about the BCFU men involved in the scuffle, as he deemed that they were “no doubt all of the lowest grade of society.”

With the newspapers already turning against the union, the BCFU’s aggressive defence of the water did not make for good press. The event led many in the English language press to publicly call for the military presence that the canners were demanding by way of private telegram. The Daily Colonist used the event to take issue with the lack of “protection” that the fishers were receiving from the federal government. The report further complicated the issue of violence as it called for violent measures to protect the canners – in the name of the fishers who wanted to abandon the union. “Canners are of the opinion that the Dominion government should send the Quadra and a force of officers to patrol the fishing grounds and prevent violence towards all desiring to fish.” Once again the protection being discussed was not for the overwhelming majority of fishers who withheld their labour in solidarity – and the call for protection made no mention of fisher initiated resistance to the BCFU. Increasingly violence was defined as something done against canners’ interests, and it was these interests that were to be protected, not necessarily Japanese fishers.

The Province further promoted the feeling of danger on the waterfront as they published a page three story that emphasized the inability of the special constables to deal with the situation. Under the provocative sub-headlines, “Fishermen Attack Non-Union Man Near Steveston,” and “Useless Constables,” the paper made a pitch for larger police intervention. When the editorial argued that, “[t]he more determined appear ready to use violent means to secure their end,” it was speaking only of the union patrols, and not of the canners’ calls for the Quadra, the militia, or even of the special constables. “The law must be respected, whatever else happens, and the authorities will be obliged to take the necessary steps to maintain order. They have no choice in the

168 British Columbia, Papers Respecting the Strike among Fishermen, 1011.
And the reality was that they truly did not have a choice. Two days later the canners bypassed the provincial authorities and called in the militia on their own terms to end the strike.

Chapter 3: “With Worsnop to Steveston”: The Militia Arrives and the Strike Ends

Table 3: Timeline of Events (July 22nd to July 30th, 1900)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22nd</td>
<td>BCFU Vote 91% in support of holding out for twenty-five cents.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Up to 4,000 Japanese fishers march around Steveston after deciding to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>return to the water for twenty cents a fish.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Canners hold a private meeting with the police to discuss calling in the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>militia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23rd</td>
<td>Frank Rogers arrested on charges of intimidation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th</td>
<td>Duke of Connaught's Own arrives in Steveston at 6 a.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Over 3,000 Japanese go out fishing.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rogers released.</td>
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<tr>
<td>29th</td>
<td>BCFU agrees to fish for nineteen cents per fish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30th</td>
<td>BCFU agreement with the canners ratified.</td>
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</table>

After the clash on the evening of 20 July, the strike came to a quick conclusion for JFBS fishers. On 22 July, while BCFU fishers voted overwhelmingly to stay the course and hold out for twenty-five cents, JFBS fishers made a reportedly unanimous decision to return to the water for twenty cents a fish. Up to four thousand Japanese paraded around the streets of Steveston behind the Japanese flag in celebration of their decision and as a show of strength. The canners, meanwhile, met behind closed doors and convinced three Justices of the Peace to sign a requisition to bring the militia to Steveston. Shortly before the militia arrived on 24 July, BCFU leader Frank Rogers was arrested on charges of intimidation only to be released a day later. While Rogers was detained, the Japanese fishers returned to the water en masse. After a month of

claims in the press that violence was a certainty in Steveston when the Japanese returned, none occurred. The BCFU agreed a few days later to go back for nineteen cents a fish – a rate that was to be guaranteed for every fish brought in, without the limits that the Japanese were given of six hundred fish.\textsuperscript{175} The strike was over.

This chapter deals with the final days of the strike. It discusses the events outlined above and explains how the contemporary newspapers overlooked and simplified Japanese action and cannery advantage. They presented the Japanese as a single unified entity, and the protocol that led to the militia being called as being impartial. This chapter uses Kobayashi’s examples of Japanese experiences to demonstrate that in the late stages of the strike the JFBS continued to hold a strong negotiating position, and to further the argument that there was a significant split within the Japanese community. This chapter also establishes that the increasingly anti-labour media presented as normal the cannery owners’ conceptions of how the industry should be run and how society should be governed. The advantages conferred on the cannery owners by their accumulated wealth and the connections this afforded them with government and authority went unexamined. Some contemporary reporters and fishers saw the call to the militia as aiding the Japanese, a notion that lingers in some histories; government documents reveal, however, that the Duke of Connaught’s Own were brought to Steveston only with the intention of bringing profit back to the canneries.

3.1: Press View of the BCFU Vote

On 22 July, six hundred BCFU members voted on fish prices. They chose from among the so-called “canners’ rate” of twenty cents, the BCFU rallying cry of twenty-five cents, and a compromise rate of twenty-two and a half cents. The results were to form the basis of the BCFU’s price demands in final negotiations with the cannery owners. Four hundred and ninety two of the five hundred and forty one members who voted chose

\textsuperscript{175} “The Strike is Over,” \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 30, 1900, p3.
twenty-five cents.\textsuperscript{176} Their joyous celebration of achieving ninety-one percent support was not matched by sympathy in the press. Instead, the press portrayed the BCFU meeting as a case of violent intimidation of its own members. Arguing that because only one sixth of the total white fishers took part, the editor of the \textit{News Advertiser} insisted that the result had little credibility and even presented the event as evidence of union weakness. “As a matter of fact, there is no longer any doubt that a very large proportion of the white fishermen, and practically the whole of the Japanese, are now anxious to accept the price offered.”\textsuperscript{177} His reasoning went beyond the vote to include instances of intimidation and violence. Ignoring the use of special constables to intimidate the fishers, he focused instead on skirmishes on the water – both actual and rumoured. “That our view of the situation is the correct one is shown by the fact that intimidation and actual force have been found necessary to be brought into use by the leaders of the strike, to prevent hundreds of white and Japanese fishermen from beginning to fish.”\textsuperscript{178} The \textit{Daily World} agreed, voicing disappointment that the settlement “everyone” had come to expect had not materialized. For the fishers who were willing to go to work for twenty cents, “there is a belief that they should and will be protected from harm,” so even though the overwhelming majority of fishers had voted to hold out for twenty-five cents a fish, it was their “duty,” the editor argued, “to fall in.”\textsuperscript{179}

The press invoked notions of civic duty, an individual’s right to work, and the importance of the province’s business reputation as reasons to downplay the BCFU’s democratic action. Press views on these matters favoured the position of capital, and their reports of “violence” and intimidation centred on the two previously discussed skirmishes that were BCFU responses to canners’ provocation. The English language media ignored the aggressive actions of the cannery owners because these were made with the official sanction of government. The common narrative of the strike largely does

\textsuperscript{176} “Excitement at White Heat: Fishermen’s Strike Rapidly Approaching the Acute Stage,” \textit{Vancouver Province}, July 23, 1900, p1.

\textsuperscript{177} “The Fishery Dispute,” (editorial), \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser}, July 24, 1900, p4.

\textsuperscript{178} “The Fishery Dispute,” (editorial), \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser}, July 24, 1900, p4.

the same; even though it emphasizes white intimidation and violence towards Japanese, the canners’ actions are not included.

The clearest example of the press’s turn to complete agreement with the canners came not in the consistently anti-labour News Advertiser or Daily Colonist, or even in the newly anti-labour Province, but rather in the Daily World. Their page three report on 23 July demonstrated the canners’ strategy of using police protection to provoke a response from the BCFU was known and accepted.

[I]t being the intention of the cannerymen to leave until to-night the settlement of the important question of whether a part of the men who wish to fish can do so under police protection, or whether the Union controls the situation entirely. To-night, it is the plan to send out a number of boats well guarded. The Union fishermen of Steveston are not slow in saying that if such is done there will certainly be trouble. On Sunday night it was currently reported at Steveston that a warship had already been sent up from Esquimalt and that she was lying in the Gulf. But no authority could be obtained for the statement, although it obtained general credit among the fishermen.180

Although the rumours of a warship’s inclusion in the government plan were exaggerated, the matter of fact discussion of the possibility is revealing of the extent to which the English language press saw it as acceptable to use state resources of deadly force to threaten the lives of the recalcitrant fishers. The News Advertiser editorial page insisted that the BCFU policy was “enforced idleness,” and argued that while seemingly “trifling,” the union’s action was life threatening. There was no onus on the provincial forces to restrain themselves or on the canners to negotiate. The only responsibility for potential lost life – of fishers – lay on the fishers themselves. The very word “peace” came to mean “cannery profit.”

No justification exists for such a situation, and it cannot be allowed to continue, since it is a menace to the peace, an injury to the interests and

the good name of British Columbia, and an outrage on those who are willing but are not permitted to work.\textsuperscript{181}

In the view of the press that covered the event and accounts for the majority of the historical evidence of this event, peace, business reputation and the right to work were better served by the presence of a naval gunship aimed at unarmed fishers than by the democratic vote of the BCFU.

3.2: An Indescribable Procession Follows a “Unanimous” Vote

The JFBS also gathered their membership in a large field on 22 July. They also voted, though not by secret ballot. The result of their public vote was unanimous: they agreed to fish for twenty cents per fish for the first six hundred caught in a given week, and fifteen cents for all fish beyond that number. The fishers then celebrated their decision to return to work by marching through the streets of Steveston behind the Japanese national flag. No detailed description of this event exists. It met no resistance from the BCFU and led to no violent response.

Not only was the JFBS march unimpeded by white fishers, it was also largely unreported in the English language press. The \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser}, which did not go to press on Mondays and therefore had two full days to plan their Tuesday strike report, merely noted that the Japanese had held a meeting and did not even mention the march through the streets.\textsuperscript{182} The report repeats the assumptions that have been consistently challenged in this thesis: that the Japanese gave into the canners, that they negotiated only from a position of weakness, and that unanimous agreement was natural, as if part of a passive racial character.

Steveston July 23 – A meeting of the Japanese fishermen was held here this afternoon, some 3,500 being present. The unanimous decision of the Japs was that they go out and fish to-morrow on the canners’ terms, namely 20 cents a fish and 15 cents if the price of the canned article

\textsuperscript{181} “The Fishery Dispute,” (editorial), \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser}, July 24, 1900, p4.
\textsuperscript{182} “The Strike,” \textit{Vancouver News Advertiser}, July 24, 1900, p5.
dropped or the run was large. The speakers stated that they had waited for three weeks for the white fishermen to make a move, and that they could not afford to lose the whole returns of the season’s work. They had already lost a great deal more than they could afford. And that starvation or something like it was staring them in the face in the Winter [sic] if they stayed idle any longer. If the run was an average one they could still hope to make enough to live on until next year.\footnote{The Strike,\textit{ Vancouver News Advertiser}, July 24, 1900, p5.}

The \textit{Province} allotted a mere five sentences to what they labeled a “Japanese Demonstration.” This small subsection of a much larger article on the BCFU vote notified readers that “over 4,000 of the little brown men” had marched through the streets of Steveston to celebrate their decision to go out and fish the following day at twenty cents per fish.\footnote{Excitement at White Heat,\textit{ Vancouver Province}, July 23, 1900, p3.} In the \textit{Victoria Daily Colonist}, the Japanese action was only afforded mention and a sense of passing significance in its comparison to the BCFU’s inability to get together more than five hundred people to counter-march.\footnote{Striking Fishermen,\textit{ Victoria Daily Colonist}, July 24, 1900, p1.} The \textit{Daily World} reported the event in racialized terms, noting that the “Orientals are usually an unemotional people, but the Japanese’ cheering when the resolution was passed, could be heard a mile away.”\footnote{Japanese Fishers Break Deadlock,\textit{ Daily World}, July 24, 1900, p.1.} Even this observation was made only in passing; the paper offered no discussion of the event or the people in it. The extent to which English language papers downplayed the significance of the actions of the Japanese population can be seen clearly on this occasion; even though they claimed that the waterfront was a powder keg waiting to be ignited, they dismissed an agressive march of the largest crowd of people the community had ever known. The only press interest in the Japanese fishers was in describing them as strikebreakers, and it assumed there was such a thing as a single “unemotional” Japanese voice and a
singular Japanese desire to return to the fishing grounds. These perceptions persist in
the historiography.¹⁸⁸

Kobayashi’s account does not offer a detailed description of the vote or the
march, recording only that, “[w]hen the speeches ended and counter measures were
announced, three thousand Japanese gave the imperial banzai three times. They then
formed a magnificent rank and paraded from one end of the Steveston fishing village to
the other.”¹⁸⁹ Regrettably, no description beyond this has been uncovered in researching
this project. The event certainly deserves the detailed and colourful description that the
BCFU marches received earlier in the month. The use of the cheer and the Japanese
national flag are significant, however. While it is hardly surprising that the members of
the JFBS identified their cohesion as a group with Japanese national symbols, that they
were willing to openly display these symbols to Steveston residents, many of whom were
openly antagonistic to the presence of Japanese in BC, is a remarkable display of
confidence that is entirely counter to the image of a group of people who felt cornered
and powerless.

While Kobayashi’s account of this day lacks specifics of the march, it does add
details to the surrounding events that complicate our understanding both of the JFBS
action on 22 July and of the purported unity of the Japanese community in Steveston at
the time. His record of the day is clear on three things. First, it demonstrates that the
unanimity of the decision to return to work, and the unity of the marchers were enforced
and incomplete. Second, it indicates that there was a strong message from the JFBS
leadership to its membership that the BCFU would seek violent reprisals for the
Japanese return to the water. And third, his work notes that the leaders appealed to
Japanese national pride and emphasized the importance of the historical moment to

¹⁸⁸ For some examples of authors who either directly refer to the Japanese as strikebreakers or
describe them as succumbing to the canners’ will, see: Ralston, “The 1900 Strike,” iv;
Barman, The West Beyond the West, 215; Ward, White Canada Forever, 121; Adachi, The
Enemy that Never Was, 59; Yesaki, Sutebusuton, 16.
¹⁸⁹ Teiji Kobayashi, 35 Nen Shi, 96. [translated by author]
their community’s long-term development in Steveston. These three aspects of Kobayashi’s work are addressed separately below.

Kobayashi’s account includes discussion of the decision-making process within the JFBS that beyond any other evidence indicates that the Japanese in Steveston were at least partly divided, and that the leadership of the JFBS had total say over negotiations. The Japanese fishers who did not side with the JFBS do not have a voice in this history. While their voices cannot be directly presented here because of a lack of sources, there is important evidence regarding their experiences that offers a more nuanced look at the hierarchical divide within the Japanese community in Steveston in 1900.

You see, at this time it was not as if there was the police system that there is today – the fishers’ dantai had their own police officers. In the case that someone was inconvenient for the dantai members – they went in front of the dantai board. The management had their own court which could impose banishments and fines.

In the midst of this trouble the following was spoken against the idea of going out fishing: “We existed between life and death during the Sino–Japanese War and managed to get through. We came all the way to this country and now don’t want to enter the same kind of danger again.” And using this as guidance about 40 people made a similar proposal. Immediately some of their members were exiled from Steveston, and others were fined – this drew great argument.

Looking back this seems excessive [violent], but at the time it was very important to keep order and organization. If a problem had occurred at this point, though not welcome [though horrible], great bloodshed – like rain of blood – would have been unavoidable. There were many reckless daredevils on both sides, so there was no other way to stop this from going to its natural conclusion.\textsuperscript{190}

It hardly seems surprising than an organization as large and ambitious as the JFBS had rules of conduct. However, the JFBS has become synonymous with “Japanese” and if we have indications that they banned members, it indicates that historians have granted

\textsuperscript{190} Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 96-97. [translated by author]
them the power to define “Japanese” as being members in good standing with the JFBS. The above example from Kobayashi makes clear, however, that even though the JFBS drew on Japanese national symbols, many migrants from Japan did not link their identity as being Japanese to a need to be acquiescent to leadership of their community benevolent association.

That the apparent unity of the membership in JFBS was enforced is further evidenced in the text of their constitution. This document lays out the rules for the type of banishment mentioned above, and there are clauses that discuss a blacklist process. Seven of the eighty regulations dealt with these matters, though often in a general way that left room for interpretation. The reasons listed for which a member could face punishment were “breaking the rules,” attempting to transport a person to the United States, cutting the nets of another fisher in retaliation, committing illegal acts or doing “things to the detriment of the JFBS,” and not reporting a found net (and keeping it for oneself). Even house bosses faced forced resignation and blacklisting if they failed to pay their bo-ri. 191

The JFBS leaders who spoke on 22 July profited from this system, but they also made considerable efforts to build a community in Steveston. Their speeches on this day emphasized that the decision they were faced with was much greater than the immediate context of the strike. It was discussed in terms of its role in the future of the community and its development in Steveston. Though no quotes remain extant, Kobayashi described the speeches as such:

For the sake of the future, the recent events must be told. It is commonly said that Japanese must bear the stigma of being strikebreakers. But in the case of this dispute it is clear that canneries could not pay 25 cents a fish. From the opening announcement of 15 cents we insisted on 20 cents, risking every danger to finally be able to get out fishing – to get a victory for our countrymen. Today is a day to think of Steveston as more

191 “Regulations of the Japanese Fishermen’s Benevolent Society of Fraser River, 1900,” reprinted in Teiji Kobayashi, 35 Nen Shi, 66-78. [See regulations 27, 38, 60, 62, 63, 69, and 78.]
than just a place where many of our fellow countrymen live as foreign residents – within our bitter experiences has been inserted a plan for the future. Today should be greatly appreciated for many reasons.\textsuperscript{192}

The JFBS leadership framed the day as an important step for the entire Japanese community in Steveston, and by putting the Japanese actions at the centre of the strike narrative the strike’s role in the development of a Japanese community in Steveston becomes apparent; however, as so often is the case with calls to national identity and unity, those making the call had the most to gain, and subtly suppressed important differences in the people they encouraged.

Regarding fear of reprisals from white fishers, Kobayashi’s narrative describes an “ominous air” in Steveston and discussions of a calculated strategy by JFBS leaders to protect their members. In one section Kobayashi records that, “the white side put up posters on telegraph poles everywhere … that read something to effect of ‘shoot to kill all Japanese who take out boats.’”\textsuperscript{193} The similar content of the sign to the one discussed in Chapter 1, and the absence of mention of this sign in any other contemporary account, indicate that this is most likely a chronologically misplaced reference. This is another reminder of how important it is to put the available sources of this event in conversation. Later in his narrative, however, Kobayashi does describe an example that is specific to the events of 22 July which better indicates the organized manner in which this threat of violence was approached.

At long last the Japanese side decided to go fishing – they decided to abstain until the following day at 2pm. All fellow countrymen gathered in a wide field and two or three dantai managers stood up on broken boxes and spoke at the top of their lungs. And at the same time as they gave

\textsuperscript{192} Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 95. [translated by author]
\textsuperscript{193} Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 92. [translated by author] Note that Kobayashi’s account does not include a quote of the sign’s text. It merely makes an imprecise reference to the sign proceeded by the phrase, “something to the effect of.”
encouraging speeches, they delivered the plan as to how [in what way] they could counter violence from the white side.\textsuperscript{194}

Unfortunately the details of these plans are not included in Kobayashi’s collection. The plans, however, could in no way have matched the intensity of the plan that the canners brought to fruition on 24 July.

3.3: The Militia Arrives

In the early hours of 24 July, “[b]uglers rode round Vancouver calling assembly from a trolley car.”\textsuperscript{195} In response, approximately two hundred men hastily jumped out of bed, pulled on their uniforms, and headed for their local barracks. After years of leading drills, Lieutenant Colonel C.B. Worsnop led the British Columbia Regiment, more commonly known as the Duke of Connaught’s Own Rifles, into action. They made their way to the Steveston waterfront by way of a steamship, arriving at six o’clock in the morning. One hundred more members would join a few hours later from New Westminster. Three hundred armed soldiers entered the history of the Steveston fishers’ strike.

The arrival of the militia was followed a few hours later by the first intensive fishing day of the season. Over three thousand Japanese fishers went out under their new agreement. False rumours that the Japanese were heavily armed again dominated reports of their return. The \textit{Daily Colonist} noted that the “busy little Japanese” were heading out in 1,500 boats and that “[m]ost of the Japanese had rifles in their boats, which they leisurely loaded as they set sail, and the police accompanied them in tugs to the open river.”\textsuperscript{196} Although the militia arrived just as the Japanese returned, the militia had not been ordered in by the provincial government to protect Japanese fishers from racist BCFU attacks. And although the \textit{Daily Colonist} claimed that Steveston was under martial law – a claim that is still repeated in some histories of the event – this was not

\textsuperscript{194} Teiji Kobayashi, \textit{35 Nen Shi}, 96. [translated by author]
\textsuperscript{195} Harker, \textit{The Dukes}, 27.
the case. The cannery owners ordered the Duke of Connaught’s Own Rifles to Steveston to protect their economic interests as can be seen clearly in examining the process under which the call to the militia was made. This process took place behind closed doors with the details being kept out of the press until months later, so although it had a great effect on Japanese experience in the strike, no Japanese were involved, and Kobayashi makes no record of it.

The press did not challenge the logic and process with which the call was made, and very little discussion has been made of this in the historiography; no discussion of this has been made in Japanese-Canadian historiography. The way in which the militia was ordered out, however, is every bit as important to the narrative as their actual arrival.

The call was made under pretences that there were great threats of violence, yet the *Daily World* noted that, “the authorities consider it unlikely that there will be any great difficulty even then, basing their view on the orderly way in which the strikers have conducted themselves during the trying weeks.” The difference in perspective is understandable because the “authorities” that the paper referred to – the police on the ground in Steveston – were entirely different than the authorities responsible for calling out the militia. Three Justices of the Peace, all three of who were closely connected to the canneries, were responsible for calling out of the Duke of Connaught’s Own. This was done according to protocol laid out in the Militia and Defence Act, and met the letter of the law, if not the spirit. This protocol, which historian Peter Silverman has aptly labelled “ludicrously simple,” allowed the canners to personally call in military force as they had three Justices of the Peace in their midst. The three signatories were M.B. Wilkinson, owner of the Dinsmore Cannery and Reeve of the Richmond Municipality;

199 Ralston, “The 1900 Strike,” 139.
Edward Hunt, a Steveston businessman; and Robert Whiteside, the foreman of the Pacific Coast Cannery. Their explanations for taking such a drastic step indicate that the decision was made without any substantial evidence of a threat. The only rationale offered was that one of the three had seen the fracas on 20 July, and the others had heard rumours. The focus on racialized violence between fishers has pushed this critical element of the strike’s history out of the common narrative.

In sworn testimony, Wilkinson would later freely admit that he was not actually in Steveston when he signed the requisition. He was seven miles away at his North Arm cannery and had not been to Steveston for almost a full week. As he had no way of observing the affairs in Steveston directly, he claimed he signed the requisition, “[j]ust from my own knowledge.”201 The cannery owner confessed that it was difficult to know what was going on, and that hearsay was the key information source. When asked whether he was “aware of any actual acts of violence at Steveston,” he answered, “No; I saw nothing myself; it was practically hearsay all the time.”202 He had, however, witnessed a single instance of intimidation near his own cannery. Wilkinson recalled seeing a man pull out a rifle to defend himself against union patrols. Two questioners, a Mr. Oliver, and a Mr. Smith, found it odd that even though Wilkinson made no attempt to use his position to have these patrols arrested near his own cannery, he saw it as reasonable to call out the militia for rumoured actions seven miles away.

Mr. Oliver: You didn't give any instructions, as a Magistrate, to have these men arrested?
A. No.

Mr. Smith: Didn't you consider that necessary when the man had to protect himself with a rifle?
A. Well, had they interfered with his property at all I would have considered it necessary.

201 British Columbia, Calling Out Militia at Steveston, cxlii.
202 British Columbia, Calling Out Militia at Steveston, cxlii.
Q. You didn't consider it necessary to take any action to arrest these men, and yet you considered that the condition of things on the North Arm was sufficient to sign a requisition to call out the Militia at Steveston?

A. Yes, and I still consider it.

Q. But you didn't consider it necessary to arrest the men who interfered with this man?

A. Well, I would have if the man had laid any complaint; but I saw the man hold up his rifle himself.203

Wilkinson’s explanation indicates that at best the call to the militia was an overreaction to unsubstantiated rumours; and combined with the testimony of the other two Justices of the Peace, it suggests that it was much more likely a calculated action to end labour resistance.

The testimony of Mr. Hunt revealed that the requisition to call the militia had been drawn up days earlier, and delivered to Steveston by a Pinkerton’s agent who had been hired by the canners’ combine. Hunt explained that after the agent delivered the requisition, the canners held a meeting to discuss their strategy.

We had a meeting in Malcolm & Windsor’s cannery on the Monday night. [23 July] It was a meeting mostly of cannerymen; there was quite a number of people there; Mr. Whiteside and myself, too; Mr. Lister was also there, and Mr. Murray, of the police department. Mr. Malcolm was asked to be chairman of the meeting. He explained that the meeting was called to discuss the advisability of calling out the Militia.204

There is no record of Japanese representatives being present. Mr. Hunt admitted that he had not seen any acts of violence throughout the whole strike; when asked why he then felt that the militia was necessary, Hunt told the Select Committee that he feared conflict between the Japanese and white fishers because he had heard a lot of “bitter” talk amongst the white fishers. He added, “I don’t think the white men should have any grievance over this Militia question, because if it had come to a row they [the white

203 British Columbia, Calling Out Militia at Steveston, cxiiv.
204 British Columbia, Calling Out Militia at Steveston, cxlvi
fishers] would really have had the worst of it."\textsuperscript{205} And when asked if he felt that there were sufficient threats or "lawless acts" to warrant the calling in of the militia, he also replied in the negative, and indicated that the disturbance was amongst the fishers and not generated by the cannery owners: "No, because you can allow men quite a bit of latitude. You know, as long as they only talked, there was no harm done. I was really afraid there would be trouble between the two classes of people."\textsuperscript{206} When he was pressed on this point and forced to admit repeatedly that he had seen "no indications of violence—nothing more than talk," he displayed the arrogance of a man who has the power to make a decision to bring guns to his community knowing that under no circumstances would they be aimed at himself. "Well, I tell you, Mr. Smith, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." He was then asked directly about violence on the river. Again, Hunt was only able to deny having seen any: "No; I can't say that I did. That is only talk, you know." Much as the special police had been sent in by the Attorney General in response to the beliefs and hunches of the cannery owners, the militia was also called in simply because the canners had the power to do so. For those in the Japanese community who wished to fish for twenty cents per fish, this worked to their great advantage; but it was not for their great advantage that this decision was made.

Robert Whiteside emphasized in his testimony that insufficient numbers and inadequate experience of the special police necessitated the calling in of the militia.\textsuperscript{207} In terms of violent acts that may have precipitated the need for militia, Whiteside referred only to the fracas on the water on 20 July that he had personally witnessed.\textsuperscript{208} That night he overheard a statement that became his key reason for signing the requisition. "I heard one of them say: 'If these Japanese go fishing to-morrow morning they will never come back.'"\textsuperscript{209} And with this line of reasoning, a threat heard by a single cannery foreman and a general sense of doom by two of his close colleagues came not to be the

\textsuperscript{205} British Columbia, \textit{Calling Out Militia at Steveston}, cxlvi.
\textsuperscript{206} British Columbia, \textit{Calling Out Militia at Steveston}, cxlvi.
\textsuperscript{207} British Columbia, \textit{Calling Out Militia at Steveston}, cl.
\textsuperscript{208} British Columbia, \textit{Calling Out Militia at Steveston}, cxlviii-clix.
\textsuperscript{209} British Columbia, \textit{Calling Out Militia at Steveston}, cl.
root of a questioning of the militia protocol, but rather a rationale for deploying lethal state owned military weapons to Steveston, and potentially using them on strikers; all without even a need to consult legislature.

To argue that there was not reason enough to call the militia is not to doubt that threatening statements were made. They were, in fact, freely made in the press. BCFU fishers made hateful and violent statements about the Japanese fishers. The emphasis on these statements, however, takes away from the fact that three men with cannery connections – an owner, a manager, and a former investor – used their power as Justices of the Peace to violently end a labour dispute in their own industry. Fishers’ violent comments made the press, but the canners’ violent ideas made armed troops move.

The canners’ action was well supported by a press that was weary of the leaders in the BCFU and disinterested in challenging the logic of the protocol of the Militia and Defence Act. The News Advertiser report perhaps best reflected the press’s support for the logic of the three Justices of the Peace. The paper admitted that no violence had occurred, but they made it clear that violence had been probable based on the number of fishers present – about three hundred: “Had, however, any man in the crowd offered to lead the men in an attempt to stop the Japs from fishing, there is no doubt but what most of the strikers around the wharf would have followed him with perhaps terrible results.” This type of speculative damnation of the BCFU fishers was further promoted by the Daily Colonist, which printed an official statement from the executive committee of the Canneries’ Association that used an admitted rumour in an effort to increase fears of violence and to build support for the decision to call the militia:

210 For one example of such comments see: “Japanese Fishermen Break the Deadlock,” Vancouver Daily World, July 24, 1900, p1.
211 The danger here is in appearing to let the racists off the hook; however, not including the canners’ actions in the discussion is to let them off the hook.
212 “The Strike,” Vancouver News Advertiser, July 26, 1900, 8.
There may be bloodshed before the strike is over. We have a report that twelve strikers were seen to leave the river bank in patrol boats, each armed with a rifle; but this news has not been confirmed. The latest authentic news is that a large number of Japanese and Indian fishermen put out to fish from Rithet’s cannery and the strikers followed them and drove them back again.\textsuperscript{213}

There is no record of this “authentic news” happening. And yet, the common narrative of this event includes discussion of such violence while failing to sufficiently call into question the decision to bring the militia to Steveston.

The English language press did not stop at justifying the militia’s presence, they also encouraged the militia to do what they were trained to do. The \textit{News Advertiser} hoped the armed militia would be diligent in their task and by doing so, “act as a deterrent on those who have been guilty of unlawful acts.” The strong arms of the militia were proudly noted and the militia were absolved of possible future guilt as the paper claimed that if “disturbances occur with loss of life, a terrible responsibility will rest on those who have caused the trouble by their incitements to violence and unlawful acts,” by which they meant the BCFU leaders.\textsuperscript{214} And loss of life was not an unreasonable expectation as the troops were as armed as the army. The \textit{Daily World} described – without alarm – the armaments that the militia carried and the way they were trained to use them on their neighbours.

It was ball ammunition and as deadly as any supplied to soldiers in South Africa. It is interesting to know that blank ammunition is never served to riflemen under occasions such as this but real ball ammunition is given according to the latest rules of the services. It has been found in past years that mobs ceased to pay attention whatever to the firing of soldiers, when fake ammunition was used. Neither are the men allowed to fire over the heads of the crowd, as then the suggestion of the regulation is that innocent persons may be injured by the stray bullets.\textsuperscript{215}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{213} “Striking Fishermen,” \textit{Victoria Daily Colonist}, July 24, 1900, p1.
\end{flushright}
Douglas Harker, who wrote an official history of the Duke of Connaught's Own, confirmed this. “Ten rounds of ball cartridge were issued to each man with twenty rounds in reserve. The men were told in the event of action being demanded them they were to ‘shoot to kill.’”

The attitude presented in the press, however, reflects BC governmental links to capital more than it presents an image of 1900 British Columbia normalcy. Just because society’s elites acted as if a total disregard for working people’s lives – as evidenced in the use of live ammunition – was an acceptable element of labour negotiation, this was not unchallenged. As Harker also noted in his 1974 history:

> It was a miserable affair... There had been no violence and many considered the military had no right to be there at all. There had been several questionable call-outs in the past and labour leaders were beginning to regard the militia as strike-breakers rather than defenders of the peace.

But the mood of the speculative newspapers is still represented in many BC histories that mention the event. The strike is not a major event in BC history. In the justifiably limited space it is given in wide ranging narratives, however, the 1900 Steveston fishing strike is portrayed in a way that while reflective of the racialized tension of the period, consistently overlooks the canners’ use of privilege to gain economic advantage. The attitude at the hearing showed that the canners had no real argument, but that they did not need one. If they could raise enough suspicion based on what they knew was hearsay they could call armed men to defend their economic interests.

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216 Harker, *The Dukes*, 27.
217 Harker, *The Dukes*, 27.
Conclusion: “The Frazer [sic] was Wet With Fishes Tears”218

By 30 July, the JFBS fishers had been back at work for almost a full week, and when the BCFU fishers agreed on a price of nineteen cents, a Province headline reported that “The Strike is Over.” The end of the strike that had dominated the front page of the paper for a month was reported on page three. The days after the Japanese returned to the fishing grounds had been quiet – so quiet that the BC Regiment found themselves with absolutely nothing to do. The Province found an interesting balance in their satire of the troops’ situation. To disparage the men in uniform themselves was near treasonous, but to poke fun at their lack of activity was humorous. A large cartoon [Appendix II] and a full-page satirical article “With Worsnop to Steveston,” on 28 July, summed up the BCFU’s violent resistance. The article told of the “horrors of war from the brave soldiers away out on the battlefield.” These “horrors” included sunburnt noses from sleeping in the sunshine, waiting in line to get an overpriced haircut, and soldiers ruining their best pants because they had rushed out of their houses in the first clothes they could find after being called without warning in the middle of the night.219 That a BC newspaper made satire of actual versus rumoured violence levels is perhaps the greatest irony of the entire month.

For the Japanese fishers in Steveston, July 1900 was much more than a racialized turf war with white BCFU fishers. While the strike’s history is generally reduced to symbolic images of the sign that appeared in the first week of July that called for them to be shot, their vaguely remembered march through the streets of Steveston, and the arrival of Colonel Worsnop and his men, the sources used in this thesis

218 “The Week in Caricature,” Vancouver Province, August 4, 1900, p1. [Appendix III]
219 “With Worsnop to Steveston,” Vancouver Province, July 28, 1900, p7.
demonstrate that focusing on these events leads to misperceptions of Japanese experiences at the time. These events in particular summon images of racialized identities and borders that were both real and non-negotiable: they emphasize a prevalent and lingering stereotype that the Japanese were a single unified group without varied economic interests; they suggest that the Japanese succumbed to the role of strikebreakers because they held no power to negotiate with the cannery owners who controlled key elements of their living and working conditions; and they present a view of the events as being Japanese fishers versus white fishers – overlooking the role of the cannery owners.

While the role of this particular strike in BC histories is not likely to gain prominence, it is important that the brief overviews of this event move away from perpetuating these misconceptions. The events that have been elucidated in this thesis demonstrate that the JFBS held significant power throughout the month – exemplified in the demands they made of both the BCFU and the canneries. That they were able to do so in a society and an industry that afforded great advantages to whiteness and capital is a truly remarkable element of this story that should not be pushed to the periphery. Rather than framing Japanese actions as capitulation to the cannery owners' demand of twenty cents, and instead of repeating claims of "Japanese defection" from the union demand of a quarter dollar per fish, this history needs to acknowledge that for many Japanese involved there was no quarter required; they did not necessarily choose between the cannery owners' price and the BCFU's price, but rather they negotiated until they found what they considered a fair price. The importance of Teiji Kobayashi's collection is that it offers examples of Japanese fishers finding their own price.

The entrance of the militia in Steveston presents an image of the strike concluding through officially sanctioned government action that ended a month of union violence. The sources indicate, however, that the violence of the month of July was consistently overstated in the press, and that the most violent acts of the month were

220 Ralston's abstract categorizes the Japanese return to the water as "the Japanese defection." Ralston, "The 1900 Strike," iv.
consistently those of government authorities through deployment first of special constables, and then of the militia units. The sources clearly show that these publically trained, funded, and armed forces, by way of the Attorney General, answered to the demands of, and worked for the interests of, the cannery owners in Steveston. To link their arrival to legitimate authority is to grossly overestimate the democratic nature of British Columbia’s institutions in 1900. The cannery owners’ ability to use government resources to their advantage also affected their dealings with the Japanese fishers in Steveston. They were able to pass messages to Japanese fishers through the Japanese consulate and the JFBS leadership in the Japanese language; these messages carried the combined sanction of the provincial and community leadership, making their attack on BCFU leaders and policies more effective.

The JFBS fought to mitigate the effects of the racialized hierarchy in BC society that allowed cannery owners to control large aspects of their membership’s lives; however, there were important differences of opinion in the Japanese community that have been omitted in the historiography. The image of the march through the streets of Steveston that followed a supposedly unanimous vote of four thousand Japanese fishers, when presented without mention of these divisions, promotes a stereotyped view of Japanese residents in Steveston as a homogenous group that were uncritical of a natural ruling faction that worked for the best interest of all in the community. As Peter Nunoda has suggested, these stereotypes are common in Japanese-Canadian historiography. The sources consulted here indicate that the JFBS leadership enforced a unified position through bylaws that threatened blacklisting, while gaining significant economic advantages from their position. The events of July 1900 are important to the development of a Japanese community in Steveston, but if they are not presented alongside an examination of this nuance their explanatory effectiveness is lessened by their repetition of these common stereotypes.

As the events of the strike survive in public memory largely due to contemporary newspaper accounts, the events themselves cannot be discussed without being connected to the perspectives of the sources from which they came. The role of the newspapers in creating these images is a historical event in its own right. The reports that have formulated the basis of the common narrative of this event are full of racialized assumptions about Asian and European immigrants in Canada. They are also largely
anti-union in their tone and encourage exciting notions of violent conflict between Japanese and union fishers.

In part this strike was the conflict between racialized groups of fishers that the English language press depicted. The sign, the march, and the militia are key symbols of the events of July 1900. The strike, however, also included remarkable examples that the English language press cared little about, and existing histories have neglected. Teiji Kobayashi’s work, British Columbia provincial government documents, and a re-evaluation of the English language contemporary newspapers, allow for a narrative of the strike that, while less consistently worthy of banner headlines, better reflects the experiences of Steveston residents.
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Appendices
Appendix II

Appendix III