

Strike! Strike! Strike! Strike! Strike! Strike!

by Howard MacDonald

On March 31st., through to April 11th, 285 trawler crew members and inshore fishermen in Mulgrave, Petit deGrat and Canso walked off their boats as they landed and went on strike. Indirectly involved, because they have not crossed union picket lines, are 800 members of the Canadian Seafood Workers Union who work in shore plants in the three communities. The ensuing battle has been one of the most vicious in the history of the labour struggle in Nova Scotia.

The fishermen are on strike to attain the basic rights of labour: the right to the union of their choice, collective bargaining with their employer and to strike for decent living standards and working conditions. At present the fishermen make trips out to sea of from 10 to 12 days, work 16 hours a day with only two days between trips. The boats, owned by the company, are badly in need of safety inspection, unsanitary and have no medical supplies on board: e.g., one fisherman had three fingers cut off while working and had only a dirty rag to wrap his hand in until the boat reached port, 16 hours later. When the boats do land the fishermen are cheated on the weight and grade of the fish. The company refuses to give settlement slips, to show proper earnings per trip, to pay one half of the Canadian Pension Plan as other employers do and to deduct income tax at the source. As a result, the fishermen are hit with large income tax bills and are forced to borrow from the company which gladly lends and thus keeps the fishermen in human bondage. If they have a bad trip the fishermen come in owing the company money helping to perpetuate their bondage. Fishermen have no paid vacations or holidays and have inadequate time inshore to lead any sort of a social life.

The companies involved are owned by large and powerful corporations of the U.S. and England. They are Acadia Fisheries Ltd., Mulgrave, N.S.; Acadia Fisheries Ltd., Canso, N.S.; and Booth Fisheries Ltd., Petite de Grat, N.S.

Booth Fisheries is 100 percent owned by Consolidated Foods Corporation of the U.S.A. and Consolidated owns 62 percent of Monarch Fine Foods which is connected with Lever Brothers Ltd. In 1968, Consolidated Foods had assets of \$365,000,000 and made net profits of \$87,000,000.

Acadia Fisheries is 98.4 percent owned by Universal Motor Fisheries which is, in turn, 100 percent owned by Boston Deep Sea Fisheries Ltd., of England which is, in turn, owned by the Grimsby Group of England with unknown assets.

These two foreign owned Goliaths have received massive loans, concessions and outright gifts of public funds. Acadia received a \$9,000,000 loan to build its plant in Canso but hasn't bothered to pay it back, and to date, is \$186,000 behind in interest payments. Acadia also received \$3,639,000 as an outright gift to subsidize the building up of its trawler fleet. Booth received a subsidy of \$1,837,000 for building new trawlers. The federal government also built a "public" wharf inside the Booth plant.

The government position has not changed much since 1949. In the mid-forties the government allowed what was called the Canadian Fishermen's Union, to be crushed into oblivion and their leaders black-listed by the fish companies and then allowed a Supreme Court decision to be passed - classifying fishermen as "co-adventurers" and not employees, there-by denying them the right to a union.

The strike proceeded without incident until May, with 24 hour picketing of the three plants and with all written requests by the union to begin talks aimed at settling the strike ignored by both companies. On May 11th and 12th Acadia Fisheries ordered trucks through the picket lines of Canso under the protection of a force of 25-30 man contingent of RCMP primarily to create an "incident" on which to base court injunctions and ensuing contempt of court proceedings against the fishermen. Five striking fishermen were arrested on charges of illegal parking, mischief and obstruction. On May 29th, Judge Green, the one man appointed inquiry commission, submitted an interim report recommending that the fishermen go back to work without a union and without a contract, which is exactly what the companies wanted.

On June 4th, Judge Green was wired telling him that the union fishermen had rejected his report by a

majority of 99.4 percent. On the same day the companies obtained a sweeping "exparte" injunction against all forms of picketing. The fishermen held fast to their position and maintained their picket lines. On June 10-11 the companies, with the aid of the RCMP and Sheriff read the injunctions at the picket lines. On the weekend of June 13th Attorney-General Donahue and his staff worked overtime preparing contempt actions against 45 of the fishermen of the three communities. In court on July 19th, thirteen fishermen from Mulgrave were sentenced from 20-30 days in jail. Three days later, during which fishermen stood unmoved on their picket lines, the court decided what was needed was an example to show the fishermen their place in society. Therefore, Everett Richardson of Canso, was sentenced to a prison term of nine months for daring to question the right of powerful foreign owned corporations to keep Canadian citizen's wages at a starvation level and to exploit them unmercifully under inhuman working conditions.

The one factor which the companies and government underestimated and had to reckon with: the average worker of the province. Enraged, 7,500 workers throughout the province walked off their jobs tying up over \$300,000,000 of construction. Four days later the courts released all imprisoned fishermen and referred their cases until October when things have perhaps cooled down.

The major stumbling block is the fact that the fishermen have been classified as co-adventurers and not employees. This can only be undone by legislature but the government has been stalling on the issue. The Attorney-General declares that the Provincial Secretary will refer "jurisdiction" to the Appeal Court to decide who will handle this legislature. Only until this has been clarified can the issue come up before legislature.

During July, the union and the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, demanded that Premier Smith, Federal Minister of Labour Mackassey, Provincial Minister of Labour MacKeough, and Attorney-General Donahue, take action to bring the companies to bargain in good faith with the union of the fishermen's

choice. On July 14th MacKeough called Acadia, Booth and the union in. The companies refused to meet unless fishermen attend without elected union representatives.

Parades and protest demonstrations were carried on during August by the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour in support of the fishermen. Green's final report was submitted but it differed only slightly from his first report and was rejected again by the fishermen. All attempts to bring the companies to the table, without giving up the strike, failed.

The union the fishermen have chosen as the one to represent them is the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union (U.F.A.W.U.) The big fish companies hate strong, militant unions. Why? Because unity of fishermen and plant workers is a threat to company dictatorship and control. Control means super profit, absolute authority, graft, rape of resources and smooth means of syphoning money from the public purse to fatten the dividends of foreign investors. The U.F.A.W.U. is a strong and capable union with able officers who will not be moved through bribes, threats and other forms of intimidation. Mr. Stevens, national president of the union, has recently served eleven months in prison for his struggles in obtaining rights for fishermen against other foreign owned corporations on the west coast and is prepared to do so again if necessary. It is no wonder that Booth and Acadia hate this union which is attempting to take some of their profits and give it back to the workers who made the profit for the companies, or that these companies have waged such a slanderous and malicious campaign against the U.F.A.W.U.

During the course of the six months strike the fishermen have been receiving strike pay of \$10 a week for a single man, \$15 for a married man and an additional \$1 for each child up to a maximum of \$20 a week. The total cost per week is roughly \$4,500 most of which has come from donations of other unions, individuals, etc. (\$350,000) and from U.F.A.W.U. members on the west coast \$25,000.

On Sept. 23rd, on the sixth floor of Nicholson Hall,

negotiations have finally begun but at what price? The fishermen have had to accede to unusual and far-reaching demands on the part of the company: (1) union officers and organizers to be kept out of direct meetings; (2) they demand that the inshore fishermen and clergymen elected as advisors be kept out of direct meetings; (3) picket lines must be removed with the opening of talks; (4) freedom to remove fish and fishmeal from their plants. All these were agreed to by the fishermen to entice the companies to the negotiating

table. The negotiating team for the fishermen is an "ad hoc" committee, consisting of four fishermen from each of the three communities. The committee has the right to take time out from talks to consult with their advisors in a separate room.

The strike has lasted six months and is far from over. The fishermen, have reserved the right to resume picketing if any violations of the ground rules occur or if the ten day period set for negotiations fail to settle the dispute. The companies were stalling and at-

tempting to prolong settlement until after the provincial elections, when they hoped public opinion could not force the government into pressuring the companies into settlement.

In summary, the fishermen's strike reflects the general attitude of both governments and companies that persist throughout the country. It is another example of where the basic rights of free Canadians to jointly withdraw their labour to achieve better wages and conditions is now at stake!

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At Dalhousie October 28

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Our booklet is tucked into the new Employment Opportunities Handbook. The handbook is yours for the asking at the placement office.

"How to separate yourself from the herd" won't change the world for you.

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