

## Canadian History - Starting Out

The first lodge chartered by the International Brotherhood in the province was Lodge 191 in Victoria on 25 January 1898. This was followed by Lodge 194 in Vancouver on 7 March 1898.

It is important to note that the first Stationary Boiler Inspection Act in British Columbia came into being in 1899. It was primarily an act to set up an inspection department. In 1901 the Steam Boiler Inspection Act was completely rewritten. Of particular significance was the incorporation of examinations and licensing of engineers in charge of boilers and engines. This was the first such provision in Canada.

By the end of 1902, 1,229 boilers were "on the books" of the new department. By 1916 this number rose to 5,714 giving us a good indication of how the boilermaking industry had grown in the early part of the century.

The Victoria area had long been an industrial area attracting boilermakers. For the Victoria lodge, the early members were active in organizing those who followed their trade in two of that city's boiler-shops: the Albion Iron Works and the Victoria Machinery Depot.

At this point in time the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was the organizational target of the craft unions such as Boilermakers, Blacksmiths and Machinists. The International Brotherhood and Lodge 194 were playing a leading role in this effort. These craft unions were successful, as a collective agreement was in place in 1899. By 1906, a third lodge was chartered for railroad members in Revelstoke, Lodge 466. Recognition by the CPR didn't come easy, it was won only after a strike in 1899. This was at a time when management groups were united in a well-organized and determined Open Shop Movement in the U.S. and Canada. The work week was 60 hours, and this remained in effect until 1907. Hourly rates in that first agreement varied from region to region, with B.C. attaining the highest at .365 cents.

By 1907 the rate soared to .37 cents and the work week was reduced to 50 hours. In 1908 the shop crafts began to discuss negotiating together as a unit with the railway companies to achieve a single universal agreement. The CPR's response to this intended unity among the trades was to notify its boilermakers of a reduction in their wages.

This action by the CPR greatly stimulated the formation of the Federated Trades' Movement. A strike followed in August 1908, it was described as "sharp and sustained." The company brought in strikebreakers from Great Britain. Most of these Brits refused to work after they arrived and sized-up the situation. Nevertheless, in the end the strike was lost after two months.

## Organizing

Now for a look at early leadership, the first president of Lodge 194 was Joe H. Watson, who soon became an organizer for the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Watson died in 1908 but not before he organized many other workers for the AFL and the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC).

The railway rates of pay, to some extent, influenced the rates in boiler-shops and shipyards although these operations were mostly Open Shop, but many of the workers were members of unions, thanks to Watson's efforts. Wages usually fell short of the union agreement in the railway shops, just prior to World War I, workers put in a nine-hour day, six days a week. Boilermakers and Riveters earned \$3.75 a day while Machinists earned \$3.50.

Watson's name shows up in the Minutes of the Vancouver Labour Council early in the century, as Chairman of the Organizing Committee. One group, which he organized, was the boilermaker helpers, which became Lodge 43 HD. When 26 delegates assembled in Vancouver on 2 May 1910 to form the first B. C. Federation of Labour, they chose a member of the International Brotherhood to be its president: James Cameron Watters from Lodge 43 HD. At the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada convention in 1911, Watters was elected president of the national body, a position he held until 1916.

Shipyards and boiler-shop operations grew enormously during the war years adding new members, in addition to the railroad shops. Lodge 194 entered into an agreement with Wallace Shipyards in 1916 providing for a nine-hour day at a rate of 50 cents per hour. It was a closed shop agreement to the extent that members were to be given preference in employment. On outside work the hourly rate went to 56.25 cents. A similar agreement was signed with the North Shore Iron Works providing the same benefits. Transportation, travel time, and room and board on out-of-town jobs was provided.

The leading establishments in boiler-shop operations on the Lower Mainland at the time were: the Vancouver Engineering Works; B.C. Marine; Ross & Howard; and, Vulcan Iron Works.

Twenty-seven wooden ships were ordered from B.C. shipyards during WW I, some of these were steamers and they were equipped with B.C.-built boilers, as were the steel steam ships.

There was a large submarine-building operation located on Burrard Inlet at Barnet. The subs were built by an American firm on Canadian soil, as the U.S. was still a neutral in the European War. The shipfitters, riveters and caulkers were working 11 - hour shifts at 47-50 cents per hour (regular work week was 54 hours). Time and one-half was the overtime premium except for work performed on Sunday, which was at double time. The work force was large enough to warrant the CPR to put on a commuter rail service to travel the nine miles from the city at 35 cents per round trip.

J. Coughlan & Sons, a bridge and structural steel fabricator located on False Creek began to build ships in 1917. The Imperial Munitions Board placed an order for steel cargo vessels in Canada. The first two of these were built in British Columbia, one at the Wallace shipyard and the other at Coughlin's, no steel ocean-going cargo ships had been built in British Columbia before, only one steel coastal packet had been built, Maquinna at Esquimalt in 1914.

More ships for the British account followed, then came orders for ships from the Canadian Government Merchant Marine. These kept B.C. shipyards busy into the early 1920's, when it all came to an end. It would be twenty years before another ocean-going steel ship would be built in British Columbia.

Lodge 194 peaked in membership in 1919 at about 1,600 members, By then, Vancouver had become the major industrial center in the province.

On Vancouver Island, Lodge 191 in Victoria entered into an agreement with Robertson's Iron Works in 1916 which covered employees on all work at and from the shop. It provided a rate of \$4.00 per day or 50 cents per hour. On outside work, the rate went to \$4.50 per day or 56.5 cents per hour. A similar agreement was also signed with the Marino Iron Works. Lodge 191 had won a collective agreement with Yarrows in 1917, it was a Closed Shop agreement, it shows Boilermakers earning 56.5 cents per hour. This one came about after a messy situation whereby 30 tradesmen were imported from Scotland to work on the refitting of the British cruiser HMS Newcastle. Twenty-eight of these tradesmen left the employ of Yarrows when they saw they were being used to breakdown local conditions. The dispute spread throughout the Dockyard where the work was being performed, and to other shops in the vicinity. After a week of shutdown, an

agreement was reached with all the shops in Victoria, which inaugurated the 8-hour day in that city.

Prince Rupert became a shipbuilding port in 1917 and Lodge 146 was chartered there in answer to a request of the members working up on the North Coast. It was closed out when the shipbuilding boom ended.

Union Recognition was tough to achieve prior to the war contracts, usually it took a strike or the threat of one to gain any sort of recognition at all. But union members working in these operations kept on striving for Recognition. It should be noted, that there were local unions in place in some of the important industries from before the turn of the century: the building trades, the printing trades, coal miners, longshoremen and the railway industry. These were the few who were successful in establishing a scale of wages with their employers.

## **Field Work**

Imperial Oil's refinery at loco went on stream in 1914, Lodge 194 boilermakers hired directly to the owner for the erection and maintenance. Major construction projects in the 1920's included the completion of the Stave Falls Dam, which originally started producing in 1911. The final step in the Stave-Alouette-Ruskin system was completed in 1930. Gas utilities was another source of boilermaker work, a new gas plant and gas holder was erected in False Creek as the Great Depression descended. There is a record of wage rates for 1925, boilermakers' "fair" wages was 75 cents per hour in boiler-shops and shipyards. For field work the "fair" rate went to 90 cents, with a travel allowance for jobs out of the Greater Vancouver area. The work week was 44 hours, overtime premium was time and one-half for the first four hours and double time thereafter and on all work performed on Sundays and Dominion Holidays.

The minimum amount of boiler and tank work alone<sup>1</sup> which had taken place during the depression years, was not enough to keep Lodge 194 alive, but the railroad membership was sufficient to maintain an effective presence. Angus Fraser was the Financial Secretary of the lodge from 1913 and beyond, through the good and bad times. The Vancouver Water Board was one important consumer of boilermaker services, Larry Williams was a plate contractor and C. C. Moore and Company was the only major boiler contractor in the province and it performed the boiler work in the pulp and paper industry with members of Lodge 194.

There was no standard agreement for construction boilermakers per se, shop agreements made provision for field work as we have seen above. Contractors engaged only in erection work, made a gentlemen's agreement, which was sealed with a handshake with Lodge 194's representative. C.C. Moore and Company paid the "Seattle Rate" for boiler erection at Powell River (1928) and Ocean Falls (1938). For other contractors, the going rate for building trades, like ironworkers, was the guide line.

## **Shipyards**

Open Shop prevailed in most marine operations, for example Yarrows Shipyard in Victoria, from its founding in 1893, had been "Open Shop" until 1917, when World War I war contracts caused a change of heart. A formal agreement was negotiated as we have seen above, when it lapsed following the war contracts, there wasn't any further Recognition for Lodge 191.

In 1927 the company adopted the practice of dealing directly with the Shop Committee, common practice in those days of undermining the established union. Soon after, the breakaway Local #2 was born in Victoria.

We can get a view of wages paid in B.C. shipyards during the latter part of the thirties from an issue of the Labour Gazette dated October 1938. The federal government let a contract to Burrard Dry Dock Co. Ltd. to repair a dredge. The fair wage schedule included in the contract, as per the Fair Wage Act, established hourly wages for all classifications. Hourly rates for some selected classifications are shown here:

- Boilermakers, Riveters and Electric Welders: @ .90 cents
- Coppersmiths: @ .855
- Electricians: @ .855
- Machinists: @ .75
- Pipefitters: @ .75

(Note: inclusion of the fair wage schedule was discontinued by the Tory Government in the mid-1980's).

A collective agreement in effect at the Victoria Machinery Depot in 1940 shows the Boilermakers hourly wage rate pegged at .90 cents, with a forty-four hour work week. Wage and Price Controls were put effect for the duration of the war. This was the Boilermakers' wage rate in shipbuilding throughout the province. During the six years of controls, cost-of-living allowances were legislated from time to time by the Federal Government, to match the rise in inflation. The total of these allowances amounted to about 15% for the entire period that controls were in place.

## **Railways**

Back on the railways again, boilermakers and other trades went to .74 cents in 1927 and to .79 cents in 1929. Meanwhile the U.S. rates were at .80 cents. During the depression years, deductions from pay was the rule in both countries without change in the official rates.

By 1937, the U.S. economy was on the upswing due to FDR's New Deal, U.S. rates to .85 cents while they remained at .79 cents in Canada. In 1941, the U.S. rate to .95 cents. By 1944, the U.S. rate was \$1.05 while the Canadian rate was .95 cents.

## **Construction**

In the immediate post World War II years, the construction industry, which had been traditionally dominated by the TLC-affiliated unions, came alive after many years of little activity. The International Brotherhood chartered a construction lodge in Vancouver, Lodge 359.

Lodge 359 had been organized by Jim Downie who headed up a group of former shipyard workers and industrial-shop mechanics. For the most part, the early members came out of Local #1. As the need for riggers grew, former loggers came into the lodge. Another source of recruits was the merchant marine, Canada was then dismantling its merchant navy leaving seaman and engine room personnel on the beach, for the most part these former sailors made ideal candidates for the construction industry. To a lesser extent, some came into the lodge from the mining industry. Others came in with little or no previous experience, some of the latter became competent mechanics while others did not adapt.

The first dozen years of the lodge's history were fairly busy with the post war construction boom: hydro electric projects, petroleum plants, pulp and paper mills, chemical plants, water lines, and a variety of other installations. When the boom began to subside the weeding out of the incompetents began.

## **Upgrading Begins**

The Ironworkers' Union had a tremendous boom to contend with too, in addition to all the projects outlined above, they had many bridges to build. Their new recruits came from the same sources as the boilermaker recruits, but these were not sufficient to keep up to the demand. They and their contractors joined forces to develop an apprenticeship program, with the aid of the provincial government. It was a good plan and we borrowed from it.

In 1958, Lodge 359 arranged to upgrade its present journeymen. Night classes were set up in the Pacific National Exhibition livestock pens and there was great interest shown by those who intended on making the trade a life-time career. Jack Fraser, the ironworker apprentices' instructor by day, taught boilermakers rigging at night. Later, day classes in fitting and blueprint reading were also offered, with boilermaker instructors. Unemployed members flocked to the PNE grounds for learning. Many of those who didn't take advantage of these opportunities drifted away from the lodge. It had already become clear that in order to survive in the Boilermakers, one had to be prepared to pull his own weight.

## **Launching Apprenticeship Training**

Unlike what later became the normal way to start an apprenticeship plan, Lodge 359 went it alone in 1963. A new three-year collective agreement was already in effect with no provision for such a plan. But it was evident to the members of Lodge 359 that such a plan was needed if we were going to avoid the pitfalls of the first decade of the Lodge's existence.

The original class of apprentices were first indentured to Lodge 359, with the blessing of the then Apprenticeship and Industrial Training Branch of the Provincial Department of Labour. The first recruits were induced into the lodge from various sources: part of a class of pre-apprentice ironworkers another had been a pre-apprentice pile-buck; and, the remainder were Lodge 359 helpers, who had changed classification. The Apprenticeship Plan, which originated in 1963, has ran without interruption ever since.

In 1964, a Joint Apprenticeship Committee (JAC) Agreement was signed with the Steel Erector's Association and in 1965, the JAC was written into a new collective agreement along with provision for employer contributions to an Apprenticeship Fund.

## **Plant Maintenance**

Plant Maintenance became another type of industry toward the end of the fifties, when Catalytic Construction Company obtained a maintenance agreement with British American Oil Company for their new refinery in Port Moody. A new agreement between Catalytic and the B.C. Plant Maintenance Council was signed, it was close to the construction agreements of the various trades involved, except for overtime premiums and travel time. It came on stream at a time when Lodge 359 was on the verge of starving for employment. The nearly 600 membership, which had built up during the post war construction boom was dropping off pretty fast, as new work slowed to a near standstill. A five-year recession began during the latter half of the fifties.

## **Allied Hydro Council Of British Columbia**

The newly formed (1961) Allied Hydro Council (AHC) and its signatory parties such as the B. C. Hydro and Cominco picked up the negotiated settlements in their project agreements. A 25-year power dam building program was about to begin. The building trades were united in a new type bargaining certificate and "poli-party" certification became a new buzzword in labour relations' jargon.

## **Shipbuilding-Ship Repair**

Up until 1966, the individual shipyard unions negotiated on a group basis until a settlement was achieved with a common rate for tradesmen. Then, after the majority of the unions had ratified one or two local unions would renege on acceptance, until they picked up an extra dime for their members. The IBEW and the UA were usually the culprits and they would strike, sometimes forcing the others out too, until they got what they wanted. In 1966 the LRB dumped all the unions involved, into a poli-party bargaining certificate for each Employer. This Closed Shop agreement from then on, had a common rate for journeymen.

The small wooden boatyards meanwhile, became something more than "wooden" due to a federal government subsidy program. The wooden barges on the coast began to convert to steel and the fishing fleet went to metal as well. Local 506 of the Carpenters were now representing shipbuilders of a different variety: welders and ship fitters.

These yards waited until the "major" yards settled before they went to the bargaining table. Some of the other crafts got into Local 506's yards too: Machinists, Plumbers and Painters. Local 506 never invited Lodge 359 to represent the welders and ship fitters in these yard, but efforts were made unilaterally. Success came at the Benson Bros. Shipyard, then next to the Bayshore Inn in Coal Harbour. Certification was granted to Lodge 359 by the LRB in 1964 and a collective agreement followed. Other small boatyards were later organized, resulting in certifications issued to Lodge 359.

The shipyard unions with the Internationals were united in the Metal Trades Councils in Victoria and in Vancouver, these came together into a Joint-Shipyard Conference which included Local #1, for the purpose of collective bargaining.

Later, during the mid-eighties, another marine company started up in Victoria, the Victoria Metal Trades Council failed to get on top of the situation. Suffice to say, it eventually became certified to the B.C. Government Employees Union (BCGEU). Their agreement is in the ballpark with the standard shipyard agreement.

Collective bargaining came in the federal public sector in 1967, all trades in the "Ship Repair Unit Pacific" became covered in the certificate issued by the Public Service Staff Relations Board (PSSRB) to the Federal Government Dockyard Trades and Labour Council. The Council, comprised of eleven local unions, negotiates the collective agreement with Treasury Board, representing the Federal Government. The Employer acknowledges the compensation package in the private sector for its employees engaged in "ship repair," but where Union Security is concerned, it is restricted to Open Shop with the Rand Formula, the maximum which the legislation allows in Canada's federal public service.

## **Construction Boilermakers**

Back to construction again, Lodge 359 membership had dropped during the recession (1958-'63) to barely more than 200 members and the bank account was nearly depleted too. Those loyal members who were supporting the lodge by paying dues every month were mostly employed in industrial shops and shipyards not under agreement to the lodge. Some Lodge 359 members

found employment with Lodge 191, which was enjoying a building boom that their 900 members could not fully man. A new ferry-building program was in full swing at Yarrows Shipyard, the Victoria Machinery Depot (VMD) was building a floating oil rig and the naval dockyard was busy too. Lodge 359 had to find another source of revenue or the lodge was going to go under. The Business Manager turned to industrial shop organizing as an after dinner recreation and found success at it. Door-knocking produced results, it was a fairly simple matter to become certified under the existing "fair" legislation, there were few legal hassles, it only required work. The legal profession did not become involved except in extraordinary circumstances. The democratic rule applied: the majority in the bargaining unit ruled the roost. This led to new members and another form of collective bargaining, vertical units and shop agreements.

Industrial shop organizing became an important part of Lodge 359 activities from that time onward. Construction members who recognized the value of the shop section often assisted in a number of organizing drives. Later on down the road, the shop members who were organized in this way would become a back-up source of recruits for the construction industry.

Much later, Lodge 359 set-up a Pro-Jo (probationary journeymen) Program. Shop mechanics were given evaluation tests to see what skills they possessed. Usually they had the necessary fitting skills but were short on rigging know-how, they were slotted into courses to gain the missing knowledge. The same principal was applied to shop welders, if needed, they were offered courses to bring their skills up to passing the appropriate pressure test.

The construction industry started to revive in 1963, after a five-year drought, and the lodge made considerable progress because of the boom times and a loyal membership who wanted to make a change in things affecting Boilermakers. Particular attention was paid to the caliber of new members, the upgrading of current membership earlier had produced results, according to job supervision who worked nationally. Apprenticeship Training had begun but it would be sometime before this source would meet the demand. All new incoming journeymen were subjected to rigid trade tests by the Lodge Examining Boards, before acceptance into membership.

In construction negotiations, the out-of-province boiler contractors and tankies began to be represented at the bargaining table in the 1967 negotiations. The work week was shortened to 37.5 hours and a Trade Advancement Fund was created.