

on Dollar Business—

Fishermen's Co-op is Local Success Story

The story of the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative is the story of local enterprise successfully done here in the same time, Co-operative has along massive lines in Prince Rupert since its inception. There will be those who will say the Co-op has been with buoyant conditions such a thing as another world depression out of which Co-op was born. But that is a different

story and the fact is that Co-op has recorded outstanding achievements in connection with the development of Prince Rupert's fishing industry and those who participate in it. Twenty years ago, Prince Rupert fishermen found themselves in a dire position owing to the bottom having almost fallen out of the fish market. They had cargoes of silver-gleaming silver salmon—which they used to sell for 12 to 15 cents a pound. Suddenly the market flopped and, when at the beginning of the "dirty thirties", depression price of troll-caught salmon hit rock bottom of four cents a pound, they decided they must try to do something for themselves. Counting on each other's help

and co-operation, these fishermen slowly overcame an "impossible" situation which started a "co-operative" movement along the entire Pacific Coast and left in its wake 90 per cent of Prince Rupert's fishermen — 2,500 — working together for their common good, owning an establishment worth more than a million dollars and doing a multi-million dollar business every year. But the history of Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative Association goes back to even before depression days. HOW IT STARTED Rain came down in a monotonous drizzle on the day in February, 1928, when the late Sam Olsen, Jim Wauchope and Jack Murray held their confer-

ence in Jap Inlet, just south of Prince Rupert. For several years, these three and others had pooled their resources to buy food and fishing gear wholesale. Now they wondered if not a similar system could be developed by which they could market their fish. One man could do little, three, not much more, but together a large group of united fishermen might accomplish something. So Murray was appointed to find out how fishing and marketing of fish could be carried out on a co-operative plan. THE EARLY STAGES Murray took stock of what he knew about co-operatives, but had to admit it wasn't very much. He did, however, remember the address of an association in

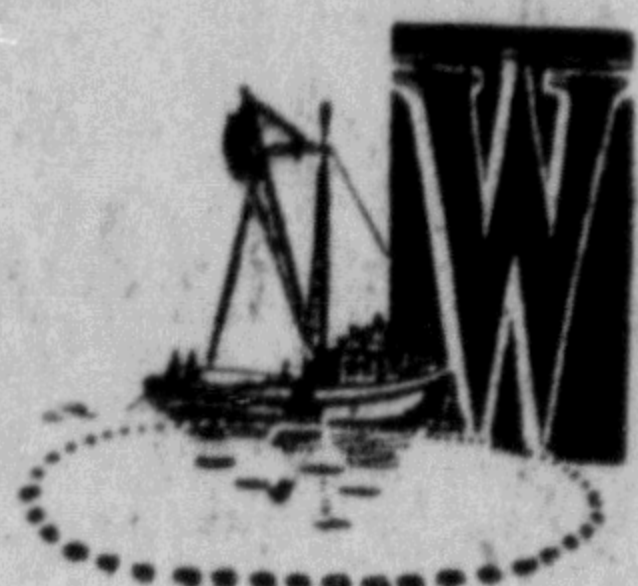
England, of which he had heard while still in Ireland. A letter to the British Co-operative Society, Holyoak House, Manchester, telling of the problems of Prince Rupert fishermen and asking for help and information, brought an immediate reply. But the answer was disappointing. "We can't help you," read the letter. "You have to help yourself." Pamphlets on organizing a co-operative society came with the letter, however, including the address of the British representative in Eastern Canada. Murray wrote again, this time to the representative, but all he got was more pamphlets. Long and sometimes heated arguments followed. Wherever fishermen gathered, there came up the subject of forming an asso-

ciation but it was not until 1931 when the bottom fell right out of the local fish market that action was taken. That year a charter was obtained by Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative Association. First, a consumer store was established on the waterfront. Then, fish-collecting was instituted, collectors gathering the members' catches on the fishing grounds and offering them to the highest bidder of several local fish-buying companies. Prices were slightly raised by this means, but at another stormy meeting members of the new association decided they must get their fish out of the

Prince Rupert area to bring higher prices such as could be obtained in Vancouver and Seattle. GET FISHPACKERS A canvass was made for funds and in 1936 the PRFCA bought two diesel-powered fishpackers, the Azurite and Ogden. Rupert-based trollers were now able to compete with the American fishing fleet to fish in outside waters of Hecate Straits, Dixon Entrance and Langara Passage and so get in on the cream of the salmon runs. This had not been possible before, since the small, underpowered vessels could not leave far from (Continued on Page 30)

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