

The Japanese Canadians

By F. E. LaViolette



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Behind the Headlines

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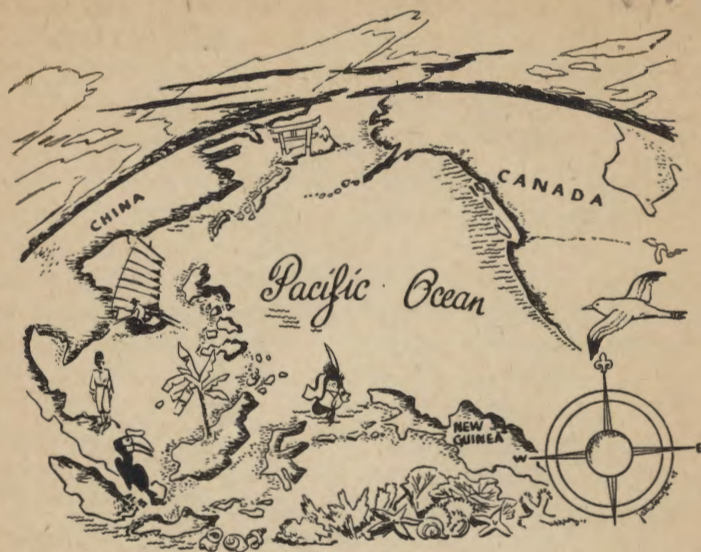
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The Japanese Canadians

by F. E. LaViolette*

The evacuation and resettlement of the people of Japanese ancestry living along the Pacific coast, carried out at a cost of about \$15,000,000.00 to date to the Canadian taxpayer, has created unprecedented problems. Although more than half the Canadian Japanese were born in Canada, and although many of their parents were naturalized citizens, they were moved by arbitrary order of Ottawa, their property was sold without their consent, and their rights of citizenship were

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denied. Domestically, this treatment raises the question of the meaning of citizenship and of racial tolerance in Canada. Internationally, it raises complications in Canada's relations with the Far East, since Canada, as a nation of the Pacific area, must live in this "one world" with the peoples of the Orient, the Japanese as well as the others.

IMMIGRATION AND AGITATION

Oriental immigration to the Pacific coast commenced with the arrival of Chinese in 1858—the year of the gold strikes on the Fraser river sand-bars. The first Japanese are presumed to have arrived in 1877. They settled on the Pacific coast because it was near Japan and because it offered them an opportunity to earn a living in their traditional occupation, fishing. The other settlers of British Columbia did not welcome Orientals and there was agitation, particularly after 1884, about their presence in the province and about their continued immigration.



Fear of Competition

This agitation was based upon two important attitudes. The first arose from the fear of being unable to compete economically with Orientals, a fear based upon the fact that in the early days Orientals were quite willing to accept a lower standard of living than were the people of European ancestry. Accordingly, one aspect of the racial antagonism had an economic origin in the problem of who was going to do what kind of work, and how much they were going to be paid for doing it. The anti-Oriental attitude was intensified by the unstable nature of a developing economy in a frontier area. A new area of settlement, such as British Columbia

has been throughout its history,* is characterized by restlessness. The stability of life characteristic of the Maritime Provinces or of Quebec requires considerable time to develop, especially in an area where there is little agriculture and a predominance of lumbering, mining, and fishing.

Fear of Numbers

The second attitude was simple but basic. What kind of people are eventually going to populate the area? The birth-rate of the Japanese was higher than that of persons of European origin and if the Chinese had had their wives with them, they too would have had a higher birth-rate. However, the white settlers wanted British Columbia to be filled up with British immigrants.‡ This was also the wish of government officials, but it was difficult, in the earlier days, to secure British immigrants or other Europeans, who were willing to go as far west as that. As long as there were mining booms to attract them, it was somewhat easier; but the need for sustained labour in order to build up the area, together with the desire to people it with British only, or, as a second choice with other European stock, created one dilemma which has come to be highly significant in the history of relations between British Columbia and the Dominion government.

Fear of Power

Despite the factors discussed above, it is not easy to comprehend the significance of the Japanese problem to British Columbians unless one stops to consider briefly the expansion of Japan as a world power. The rise and decline of Japan has taken place within a hundred years. The first Chinese-Japanese War of 1894 was the important beginning, although no one was especially alarmed at the time. In 1902, Japan signed a treaty of alliance with Great Britain, which allowed her a free hand in the Far East to attack Russia.

*Ever since the beginning of settlement, there have always been more males than females in British Columbia, a frontier characteristic. For example, in 1941 there were 114 men for every 100 women in that province.

In addition to this frontier characteristic, the population has a very definite colonial characteristic, that is, most of the people born outside of Canada were born in the homeland, the British Isles.

‡Many more details of these problems will be found in Charles J. Woodsworth, *Canada and the Orient*, C.I.I.A., Toronto, 1941. \$3.00.

Her victory over Russia in the war of 1904-1905, being the first defeat in modern times of an European by an Asiatic power, shocked the western world. As early as 1906 people began to talk about the coming war between the United States and Japan, and by 1907 the people of British Columbia were continually expressing fears of her military might. In 1914 she joined the war against Germany. This led to rapid industrial expansion through her supplying ships and munitions to the Allies, and to imperial expansion as a result of her occupation, and later retention as League of Nations mandates, of the German islands in the Pacific north of the Equator. These she fortified contrary to agreement. Japanese expansion on the mainland of Asia started again with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931. By then the pattern of expansion was clear. The second Sino-Japanese war started in July, 1937, and from then until December, 1941, tension mounted, for it was clear that Japan was determined not to stop her empire building.

Each step in the expansion of Japan increasingly disturbed British Columbians and heightened their fears of Japanese, both within and without their borders.

Exclusion

These fears led to the demand that Orientals be kept out of Canada. The Dominion government, which alone has the power to control immigration, refused to do so because it had to abide by certain treaty agreements which London had signed with Tokyo. This was not to the liking of British Columbia. Immigration reached a high peak in 1907 and declined somewhat abruptly after that, but even though it was declining, demands for complete exclusion continued. Through restrictive legislation, Chinese immigration ceased completely by 1924, but similar legislation could not be made effective against the Japanese. Many British Columbians were irritated because Japan could not be treated like China. Finally in 1928 arrangements were made for a quota of 150 per year to be admitted to the Dominion, but this annual quota was never reached.

Neither arrangement settled the "Oriental problem" or the "Japanese problem" in British Columbia. Because there

were few Chinese women, the trend in that part of the Canadian population has been towards extinction. For example, between 1931 and 1941, the Chinese population dropped by 12,000, from 46,519 to 34,627 in the Dominion. On the other hand, there are many more women in the Japanese population, and although there were fewer Japanese in 1941 than in 1931, 23,149 as compared with 23,342, the Japanese segment of the Canadian population has a better chance of survival in Canada than the Chinese because of the relatively equal proportion of sexes. Because the Japanese birth-rate has been high, as is often characteristic of an immigrant group, it has been feared that the Japanese section might eventually become larger than the Occidental section of the population of British Columbia. In general a migrating group tends to take over the birth-rate characteristics of the group into which it migrates. It is still too early to see if this will be true of the Japanese, but the birth-rate has been declining because the younger generation of native-born children, often referred to by the Japanese as *nisei*, were not all at a possible age for marriage. Further, through personal acquaintance, one gains the impression that the families of the children who were born in Canada will not be as large as those of the parents born in Japan.*

Limited Citizenship

Exclusion and the birth-rate trends did not satisfy the British Columbians, and they remained constantly disturbed by the Orientals in their province, especially by the Japanese. They were concerned about what was called "peaceful penetration" by Tokyo, about illegal entrants into the Dominion (cleared up by appropriate action) and by the suspicion that all Japanese were loyal to Tokyo even though they had been born and educated in Canada. Fearing competition, they tried both formal and informal means of restricting the occupations in which Japanese could earn a living. Within the restricted lines of work, this tended to

*In her study, *Cultural Differences in Family Size*, Bulletin F-2 of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, based upon 1941 census materials, Dr. Enid Charles shows that the average size of Japanese family for Asiatic-born women was 4.45 while for the Canadian-born women it was 2.75. The same averages for the Chinese group were 6.50 and 3.74 respectively.

increase competition, which led to an effort to exclude them from a further specific line. Not until 1942 was there a concerted and sustained effort to exclude them completely however. As well, British Columbians, along with other Canadians, have assumed that the Japanese could not become Canadians. Hence they, like other Orientals, have been denied full rights of citizenship such as voting, serving in the armed forces, jury service, etc.

Such are the historic and more general factors that set the stage for what followed after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941.

INTERNMENT AND EVACUATION

Security Measures

Although Canada declared war on Japan immediately, Canadian opinion regarding the Japanese in British Columbia did not become aroused until several weeks after Pearl Harbor. The Dominion government moved at once to intern any Japanese who were likely to be a threat to internal security. Their fishing boats were impounded. On the advice of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the leaders of the Japanese community closed their Japanese-language schools and newspapers. Already, in August, 1941, all Japanese on the coast had been registered and a committee had been appointed to handle the problem locally. This committee had recommended that no Canadian-born Orientals be drafted for military service. However, no plans had been made to evacuate the Japanese from the coast.

It now appears that British Columbians had always assumed that if war with Japan actually occurred, the government would evacuate all the Japanese in the province. Instead, its precautions seemed insufficient, especially in view of the mounting military and naval successes of Japan.



Irritated British Columbians of all kinds — politicians, professional patriots, solid citizens, along with organizations such as community service clubs were then given an excellent opportunity to organize opinion against the Japanese living on the Coast. A potent factor in controlling the moves of the Dominion government, was the fact that Canadians were prisoners-of-war in Japanese hands.

As the result of increased demands, Ottawa decided in January, 1942, to move Japanese males, 18 to 45 years of age, and who were citizens of Japan, out of the Defence Zone—a strip of about 100 miles wide along the Coast. It was also decided that the impounded fishing fleet would be put into operation once more by selling it to other operators.

These measures proved to be inadequate. First of all, the government did not want to apply any more force than necessary to the Japanese. They were extremely reluctant to go, as no provision for the care of their families or property had been announced. In the second place, these measures did not meet the expectations of the larger community. The scheme did not meet the needs of the Japanese, who by the middle of January were suffering either from unemployment or loss of business, nor did it meet the general expectations of what the government should do to protect British Columbia properly. Agitation increased; confusion among the Japanese increased. For these reasons Ottawa was finally forced to announce on February 26, 1942, complete evacuation.

This order made no distinction in citizenship. People were to be evacuated on the basis of race. It could, of course, only give general directions to the British Columbia Security Commission which was created to evacuate the Japanese and to provide for housing and all the other necessities which a group of 21,000 people would need during the period of war with Japan. But quite briefly, it did meet the demands and expectations of the British Columbians. It marks an entirely new phase in relations between the Occidentals and Orientals in Canada.

It was almost ten days after the announcement of evacuation before the government indicated that it would appoint a commission for the purpose of evacuating and handling

all problems associated with the moving of the Japanese. The first immediate task was to move the Japanese people strung along the coast of the mainland and of Vancouver Island, living mostly in fishing villages. To care for these evacuees, the British Columbia Security Commission, headed by Mr. Austin Taylor and assisted by Mr. J. Mead, Deputy Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Mr. John Shirras, Chief of the British Columbia Provincial Police, took over the exhibition grounds of Hastings Park, Vancouver, and used it for assembling and caring for evacuees until they could be moved to a better prepared area. People started moving into this Park on March 16. By October it was ready for use by the Canadian Army.

When people in the interior of British Columbia and other provinces heard that Ottawa intended moving the Japanese inland, a great number of incorporated areas sent protests to the government. The fact that the Dominion Government was moving the Japanese under the urgent conditions of war did not result in offers of co-operation from other Canadians. From the first the Security Commission was forced to follow the policy of trying to find interior homes for the Japanese only in those areas where an agreement could be reached with either provincial or local authorities. This limited the number of possibilities and hence created a very difficult problem for the Commission. It was finally solved by arranging to send Japanese evacuees to sugar beet farms in southern Alberta and in the Winnipeg area of Manitoba, and to former mining towns, the Ghost Towns. As soon as houses and hotels, and two-family dwelling units where needed, could be made fit again for human occupation, the Japanese wives, children, and older folk, who had stayed behind while the more able men went into the interior to do the work, were moved into what the Department of Labour now calls the interior settlements. Of the 21,000 people who were evacuated, about 16,000 remained in British Columbia, outside of the defence area, while the remaining 5,000 went to Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario.

In spite of the fact that conditions were very trying, that housing was very congested and firewood poor during

the first winter in the mountain region, the Japanese settled down in their new abodes and managed to get the Settlements organized. The Security Commission provided medical facilities, education through the eighth grade, and made certain that none were in want of food or clothing. If adults were employable, it was decided that they should provide their own income or else make use of their own savings in case they did not want to work. It was rather easy to state this basic policy of full employment or self-support, but it has not always been easy to define it in specific cases.

As part of the policy of full employment the Commission made arrangements for the men to cut fuel for the city of Vancouver; it also encouraged local employment where possible, and finally after it became clear that it was possible for more Japanese to go east and work in the areas where there were shortages of labour, the Commission encouraged as many as possible to resettle in eastern Canada. But this eastern movement never developed as fully as it was hoped that it would because of so much demand for Japanese labour in the West and because of the problems in eastern resettlement.

About 70 per cent. of the Japanese are Buddhists, so in two of the centres small temples have been built while in other centres services are held in available halls. The Christian group has been served by their own ministers with the assistance of missionaries who had returned from Japan. Some are helping with high school courses which parents provide by correspondence, as neither the Dominion nor Provincial governments have assumed this responsibility.

Grievances

Although the Japanese have kept in good health despite their accommodations, they have not been especially happy. This is due to a complex of factors, some easily understood, others more difficult since they are part of Japanese personality development as it reacts in acutely critical situations. Most of the Japanese have lived in Canada for more than thirty years. Citizens by birth have not been per-

mitted to serve in the armed forces, except about 150 accepted in February, 1945. It was expected that there would be some losses of property, but when the government



started selling it without their consent, then they felt that their legal position in Canada was certainly not secure. A few of these men had fought at Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele and contrary to the claims of politicians, they did take pride in being Canadian citizens. Some of these conditions could have undoubtedly been tolerated as temporary by-products of war. However, since numerous agitators as well as members of Parliament

have insisted that they all be sent back to Japan, the evacuees, in addition to knowing that almost no city in Canada wanted them to live and work in it, have felt that their future in Canada was hopeless even though it was their adopted country or the land of their birth.

EASTERN RESETTLEMENT

The evacuees who were moved to the sugar beet farms of Alberta and Manitoba can hardly be looked upon as permanently resettled. When evacuation was first planned, it was assumed that the Japanese would be moved into the interior and then, after the war, would return to the Coast. Upon this basis agreements were made with provincial governments to remove the Japanese, if requested, six months after hostilities ceased. Hence it is not certain that the sugar beet workers, though they have done an excellent job of providing labour for sugar production, will remain where they are now living. Some of these people wish to return to Japan as soon as possible. Some of them are not well adjusted to that type of work for personal or family reasons. Others will want to move east to live closer to relatives. And finally, some of them will not want to remain unless they can purchase farms and operate them as independent owners.

But since evacuation has taken place, about 3,000 Japanese moved to Ontario and Quebec in what is called the "east of the Rockies" movement. There have been many lines of work in which the evacuees could be employed and consequently the Security Commission found it desirable to establish regional offices in Fort William, Toronto, and Montreal to co-operate with National Selective Service and to assist in the permanent re-establishment of the Japanese in normal community life.

Government Favours Dispersal

In his speech of August 4, 1944, Prime Minister King stated that it was desirable for the Japanese to be dispersed across the Dominion. Since this could be done by persuading Japanese in British Columbia to take work in the eastern area where there have been labour shortages, it was hoped that many more than actually have, would take advantage of the Commission's offer to pay rail fare, a small meal allowance, and a resettlement allowance to settle permanently. But this programme never attracted as many people as expected.

In the first place, the Japanese have not wanted to leave British Columbia. To them, as with many other westerners, the east is a far distant and strange place. Many of the older folk can not speak English well. Perhaps more important, there have been jobs right there for everyone who wished to work. This has created a dilemma. Politicians have been trying to rid British Columbia of all its Japanese while at the same time various economic interests in that province have needed them.

Also living conditions in the east have been very difficult for the Japanese. In addition to racial discrimination against them by some owners, wartime congestion has made it difficult to secure accommodations for families. Furthermore, the Dominion Government early in 1942 prohibited Japanese from buying houses and farm properties.

Uncertainty and Confusion

In addition, there has been no certainty about the final aims of the whole programme of resettlement. Even in the fall of 1945, almost four years after Pearl Harbor, no gov-

ernment official has any basis on which to tell a Japanese that if he does resettle, he will be permitted to remain where he wishes to stay. The delay of the Cabinet in promoting its programme has been a definite handicap to officials who have been trying to encourage resettlement. If conditions of resettlement had been more liberal, then a larger number would have quite likely moved east.

Finally it should be recognized that the psychological developments among the Japanese who have lived in the Ghost Towns have not been favourable towards resettlement. Many of the Japanese have been confused about the future and unable to make a decision, a characteristic which develops among people who are, for example, interned, or prisoners of war.

Some Good Samaritans

Some organizations have assisted with resettlement. A few committees of citizens emerged to assist with welfare problems and with recreational and other community activities. But help to the individual resettler cannot be extended in all aspects of his problems. Time is required for each one, perhaps six to twelve months, to rid himself of emotional disturbances due to evacuation and residence in the ghost towns. And this internal emotional healing goes on mostly if the resettler is able to establish a set of sympathetic relations so that he can readjust himself according to his own individual needs. The over-solicitous samaritan can be just as harmful as the hostile employer or politician. Furthermore, it is important that the Japanese assume responsibility for establishing themselves into normal community life again. This is, essentially, the aim of the citizens' committees. A large scheme of resettlement proposed by some church groups was a failure because of the complex problems involved, and insufficient staff available to overcome the complexities.

It is not likely that many more Japanese will resettle in Ontario and Quebec. In the Montreal area, they are not conspicuous because of racial features, but it is difficult for a Japanese to compete with French Canadians unless he has some special skill or unless he has capital with which