

RIGHT THE WRONG

The December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbour by the Japanese opened one of the most sordid chapters in Canadian history. It led to the evacuation, internment and exile of most Japanese-Canadians then living in British Columbia, including a large number who were born in this country. These events were the culmination of a long standing history of anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese attitudes, actions and legislation in British Columbia in particular and in Canada generally. The 1941-48 treatment of Japanese Canadians, while fueled by rumours and pro-war national chauvinism, was therefore grounded in a lengthy tradition of racial intolerance.

Confiscation: A series of wartime regulations led to the confiscation of fishing boats, farms, businesses and homes belonging to Japanese-Canadians that were eventually sold off for considerably less than market value. The right of Japanese Canadians to travel in Canada was strictly regulated. By the end of October, 1942, approximately 21,000 out of 22,000 Japanese-Canadian residents of British Columbia were uprooted and forcibly relocated. As many as 4,000 were sent to the Prairies and Eastern Canada. Others were sent to abandoned mining towns and hastily built shack towns in the interior of British Columbia. Families were often divided. Many of the men worked in road camps.

Repatriation: In 1945, those Japanese-Canadians still in the interior of British Columbia were given the "option" of relocating in Eastern Canada or "requesting repatriation to Japan". Approximately 10,000 opted for repatriation because they were unwelcome in many parts of Canada. Once the war with Japan had ended in September 1945, the Government of Canada passed legislation and orders-in-council which would enable it to deport not only Japanese nationals living in Canada, but Japanese-Canadians who were either native-born or naturalized citizens of this country as well as their spouses and children, to Japan.

Power: Both the Supreme Court of Canada and the British Judicial Committee of the Privy Council upheld the power of the Canadian Government to take these actions. Ultimately, some 4000 Japanese-Canadians, many of whom were born in Canada and had never seen Japan, were sent to that country. They went to Japan "voluntarily" before January 1947, when the Canadian Government announced it would not formally carry out its deportation policy and repealed the deportation regulations. The restrictions on travel by Japanese-Canadians were not removed until 1948.

Not Entitled: In 1947, the Government of Canada set up a Commission of Inquiry under Mr. Justice R.I. Bird of the British Columbia Supreme Court to investigate the pecuniary losses suffered by Japanese-Canadians. It was concluded by Mr. Justice Bird that much Japanese-Canadian owned property and many businesses were sold at less than fair market value. He also concluded that many Japanese-Canadians were not entitled to compensation. Many Japanese-Canadians did not submit claims to the Commission or could not do so because they were out of the country. The awards that were made often did not represent the true value of the property or businesses that had been confiscated.

Urgency: The wrong done to Japanese-Canadians must be rectified. Members were deeply moved by the presentation made to them in Toronto by the representatives of the Japanese-Canadian community. The Canadian Jewish Congress also strongly urged that the wrong done to Japanese-Canadians be righted. There is a moral imperative and a sense of urgency underlying the claims of this community.

RECOMMENDATION

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