

Japanese Immigration

A Startling Record of Diplomatic Blunder—A National Surrender.

Conservative Government Guarded the Right of Restriction—Laurier Administration Admitted Japanese of All Classes Without Restrictions.

Reckless incapacity manifested in absurd blundering signalizes the Government's treatment of this question. It is worse even than the results of their treaty-making negotiations with the United States. In that case they utterly failed in their attempt to secure a treaty, begged Great Britain to undertake the task, assented to everything that she proposed and blamed her for the loss of territory which ensued. In the case of Japan they undertook to act on their own initiative, notwithstanding the warnings of Great Britain, and thus plunged the country into a series of difficulties from which we have by no means escaped.

BRITISH TREATY LEFT CANADA FREE

Japan negotiated treaties with Great Britain and with the United States in 1894. They were in practically the same terms with a few important exceptions, of which immigration was one. The British treaty permitted unrestricted immigration from Japan. The United States treaty reserved the right to enact laws with respect to laborers coming from Japan to that country.

The British treaty did not bind Canada or the other self-governing dependencies, but they had the right to assent to it at any time up to 25th August, 1896, afterwards extended a year.

CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT GUARDS IMMIGRATION

In 1895 the treaty was forwarded to the Canadian Government for their consideration. Although at that time there was no agitation or general apprehension on the subject, the Conservatives (then in power) foresaw that unrestricted immigration from Japan might be a serious menace to this country. They also realized that a treaty, perfectly suitable for Great Britain, might be dangerous for Canada. Therefore, by Order-in-Council of August 3rd, 1895, they refused to assent to the treaty unless Japan would agree that Canada should reserve and retain full control of the immigration not only of laborers but of artisans from Japan.

The position which Canada thus assumed was adopted by all the self-governing dependencies except Newfoundland and Natal. This dignified and patriotic attitude would have been maintained if the Conservative Government had remained in power. But ten years later despite warnings from labor organizations, from Royal Commissions, from British Columbia, from the British Government itself, Sir Wilfrid Laurier trampled under foot every reasonable safeguard, and threw wide open the gates of the great western Provinces.

On February 7th, 1896, Japan agreed to Canada's proposal respecting laborers, and on the 8th

October, 1896, Japan finally agreed that Canada should also control the immigration of artisans. It only remained to consummate the treaty thus modified.

LAURIER GOVERNMENT SEES NO DANGER

But, meantime in July, 1896, the present Government had come into power. They passed various Orders-in-Council, which utterly ignored the dangers of immigration, but advanced certain absurd trade reasons for not accepting the treaty. They persisted in this even after Japan in October, 1896, had offered to modify the treaty by conceding to Canada full control over the immigration of laborers and artisans.

Warnings as to the dangers of such immigration multiplied between 1896 and 1905. These were emphasized in 1900 by Mr. (now Judge) Morrison who pressed for the enactment of a restrictive law. In reply Sir Wilfrid Laurier insisted that Japan was exercising all necessary control. The Report of the Royal Commission in 1902 contained an equally emphatic warning.

MR. FISHER'S DECEPTIVE ASSURANCE

On his return from Japan in 1903, Mr. Fisher, Minister of Agriculture, was interrogated in Parliament by Mr. R. L. Borden, as to the probable danger from this source. His reply was as follows:—

"The Japanese Government itself forbids the emigration of anybody from the country without a special permit and for several years past they have refused to issue a permit to any Japanese to come from Japan to Canada who is a labourer or of the ordinary labouring class. Permits are issued only to merchants, students and travellers. No Japanese can leave his own country without a permit from his Government. The Government there, in accordance with negotiations with our Government, issued orders, I think, about two years ago, that for the future no permit should be given to a Japanese except the classes I have mentioned, to go to Canada, and that has been strictly maintained to the present time. I had the assurance of the Government there, personally and in writing, that that policy would be maintained."—(Hansard 1903, p. 4633.)

It will be observed that Mr. Fisher explicitly declared that he had obtained from the Japanese Government a written assurance that their then policy of restricting immigration to Canada to a mere nominal number would be maintained. The production of this written assurance was repeatedly demanded in Parliament during the session of 1908 and finally Mr. Fisher was obliged to confess that his statement as unfounded and that no such assurance had been given.

UNRESTRICTED ADMISSION OF JAPANESE

In 1905 the Laurier Government suddenly concluded that Canada should become a party to the treaty. This determination was communicated to the British Government who immediately sent a telegram on the 14th July, 1905, to the Laurier Government, reminding them of the modification insisted on by the Liberal-Conservative Government in 1895, and inquiring whether they proposed to stand by that policy. The British Government repeated this warning on the 6th September, 1905, but on the 25th September, 1905, the Laurier Government passed an Order-in-Council declaring that Canada desired to assent to and be bound by the treaty "absolutely and without reserve," that is without reserving any control over the immigration of laborers or artisans.

This momentous and unfortunate decision was carried into effect by a new treaty between Great Britain and Japan, dated July 12th, 1906, under which Canada became bound absolutely by the treaty of 1894 without any modification and thus