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Cowan, George Henry, 1858-  
Geo. H. Cowan's position on the Asiatic



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# GEO. H. COWAN'S

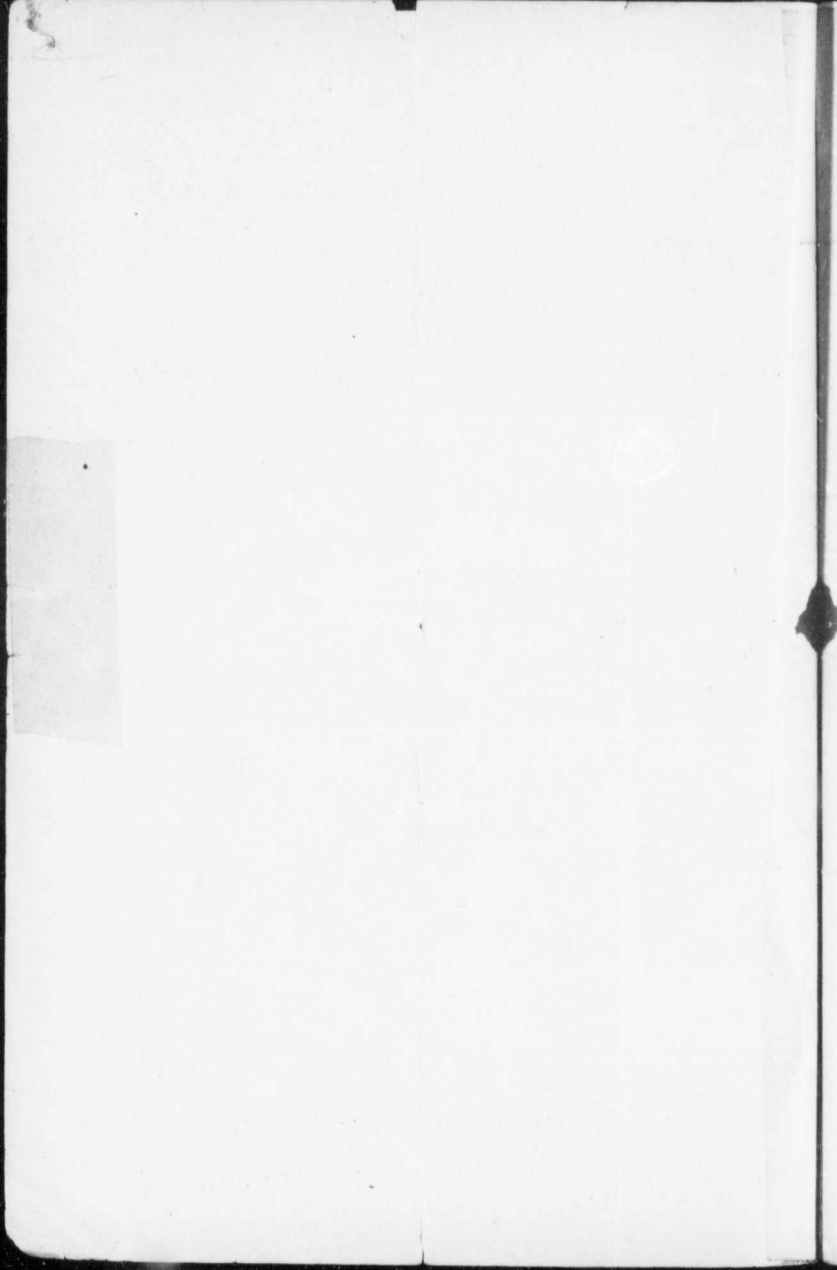
Position on the

# Asiatic Question



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Address by Mr. Geo. H. Cowan, K. C., Conservative  
Candidate, delivered in the City Hall, October 3rd, 1908.



Mr. Cowan said that, without preliminary, he would ask the attention of his audience to some remarks which Mr. McInnes made from his platform the previous evening, thus following the course which he believed to be the correct course for a man seeking the suffrages of the electors of this constituency. He would endeavor to be absolutely accurate in quoting Mr. McInnes, and he had provided himself with an exact verbatim report of everything Mr. McInnes said, and everything he did—"except this," said the speaker, extending his hands and assuming, amid laughter, an oratical attitude characteristic of Mr. McInnes. These are some of the things he said:

"Mr. Cowan, I say, did not intend to deal with that very important question last night.

#### THE ASIATIC QUESTION.

First of all, one reason he didn't was because he knew that Mr. Borden was not sound upon the question, that he gave him no message for the people of British Columbia. If he did give him a message, what is it? The next reason why he did not refer to this question is that Mr. Cowan is not sound upon it. I have no doubt that in the course of this campaign Mr. Cowan will have banners displayed around his committee-rooms, as we have, 'A white Canada.'"

A voice: "Bowen Island."

Mr. Cowan: "Let me hear that again."

A voice, repeating: "Bowen Island."

Mr. Cowan: "I have something to say about Bowen Island, and if, when I have finished, there is one man, one honest man, in this meeting who can find fault with my statement after I have made it, I will put my resignation in his hands." (Applause.) "But to go on with Mr. McInnes."

A voice: "What about a white Bowen Island?"

Mr. Cowan: "That is a fair question, isn't it?"

A voice: "Sure."

Mr. Cowan: "But for the moment, let us hear Mr. McInnes."

The candidate continued to read from Mr. McInnes' speech, to the effect that last October Mr. McInnes had no doubt of Mr. Cowan's sincerity, and that last winter Mr. Cowan, while he had been devising schemes for the relief of white working men who were unemployed in Vancouver, was having his own place

on Bowen Island fixed, cleared and put in shape by from 50 to 73 Japanese.

"That's me," said the candidate, ironically, amid laughter. "I agree with him," he continued, "that you have a right to demand from me, as a candidate for your suffrages, a clear and definite explanation on this matter. You have, and so has my friend McInnes. I am here to-night to offer an humble explanation.

"You will remember that Mr. McInnes, when he opened this campaign on the 10th of September, said he was glad that the Conservatives of this city had nominated Mr. Cowan, who was a friend of his, and a gentleman. I tell you that it grieves my heart that this friend of mine, who regarded me as a friend of his and a gentleman, should have so lost confidence in me that he, a good friend of white labor, should have thought that I had lapsed so far from virtue, that I had so far fallen from grace, in this matter that he had to withdraw his feeling of friendship and condemn me in this wholesale fashion. I can picture my little friend Billy spending sleepless night over my iniquities. Can't you see him walking in his slippers and night clothes, grieving that this friend of his and champion of Asiatic exclusion, Cowan, who, in October, denounced in ringing tones the same man as he denounced, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, for opening wide the gates to let in the deluge of alien yellow blood into this country? I tell you that when my friend McInnes lost confidence in me, it grieved my heart sorely. I felt that it was due to him, as well as to you, ladies and gentlemen, to seek the first opportunity to make what explanation, what feeble explanation, I might be able to make.

"In order that my friend McInnes may sleep the sleep of the innocent, the lily-white angel that he is, that he may rest at ease to-night, let me tell you the facts. Ladies and gentlemen, it is only too true that I did, in 1906, sell the cedar off land on Bowen Island to a shingle mill in this city—a shingle mill that is owned by a good, straight Liberal. I did sell this cedar, while staying down in the city here, attending to my business; but I took a trip up to Bowen Island, and I found that the purchasers had actually put in a Japanese camp to cut that cedar into bolts, and put it into the water. I had another lot of cedar on Bowen Island, and when this lot came to be disposed of I went to that shingle mill man and said: 'You may have the cedar off this lot, but I make this stipulation, that I

may cut the cedar into shingle bolts and put it into the water at your price.' The shingle man said, 'Very well,' and I went to work and built a ten-roomed house, at a cost of fifteen dollars—"

A voice: "Union labor." (Laughter.)

Mr. Cowan (smiling): "At a cost of fifteen hundred dollars. I bought a complete outfit and put in a white camp, and put that Japanese camp out of business. (Cheers.) Ladies and gentlemen, to that extent I am guilty, and to that extent I ask your pardon and your suffrance. (Applause.) I would not have had the immodesty to tell you that, if I had not been attacked as I have been. That is only one of the things that I have done in the interests of white labor in this city and this province.

"It is true that on the fifth of October, last year, Mr. McInnes and I—in my feeble way, he in his eloquent, thundering way—were denouncing Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the immigration of Asiatics. I had, at a cost of \$3,000, put in a white camp to take out shingle bolts, driving out the Japanese. When my friend McInnes goes down into his pocket, instead of into his mouth, to help white labor to the same extent, I tell you what I will do for him. I will pay the wages of his Chinese servant in his house. (Applause, laughter and cries of "Give it to him, Cowan.")

"It is not that I am blaming Mr. McInnes for having a very expert Chinese cook in his kitchen; because, seriously, my principle is that when we allow these aliens to land, to put foot off the water on to our shores, it is our bounden duty, in order to preserve our national honor, to treat them as ourselves. (Hear, hear," and "No, no.") It is our bounden duty to protect them in life and limb, it is our bounden duty not to treat them inhumanly, and while it is a fact that Mr. McInnes has a Chinese servant, I am not laying that at his door as a charge. What I am charging is that he is aiding and abetting Sir Wilfrid Laurier in permitting these people to come to our shores. (Applause.)

"Seriously, again, what other Liberal would get on a platform and attack a man on a point of honor without being sure of his facts?" (None but Billy McInnes.) Would you condone me for a moment, if I stood before you, an intelligent body of citizens, and deliberately, or recklessly, falsified the facts? ("No.") If I am not speaking the truth it is an easy matter for anybody in this audience, for any voter in this city, to

come to me. I have here under seal the contracts by which I ousted the Japanese from my land and put in a white camp. And the blackguardism of a man who will recklessly and without knowing the facts, dare to make these statements! On September 10th I was his friend and a gentleman; in October last year, I was not only his friend, but I was thundering, he says, in ringing tones of denunciation against the immigration of Asiatics, and condemning the same man as he was condemning—Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Assuredly, if I had a friend such as that, a man interested at heart in the same great question, I would, before I attempted to make any statements of fact against him, make some effort at least to verify those statements.

"And now, dismissing our wandering Willie from our minds and getting down to serious things that affect the future of this city, of British Columbia, and of Canada, what do we exactly mean by the Asiatic question? Do we mean, as I stated in October last year, in the Labor Hall, that this torrent of alien yellow blood shall be stopped? Is not that the attitude of 90 per cent. of the people of British Columbia? Do we not know that these people are gradually encroaching, gradually monopolising all the smaller industries in British Columbia?"

A voice: "What about city contracts?"

Mr. Cowan: "I will deal with that in a moment, and just as effectively as I have done with Bowen Island. (Cries of "Give it to them; don't spare them.")

"What is the question? Am I not right in saying that the question is whether this Asiatic influx shall be restricted or stopped?" ("Stopped.")

"Stopped you want it. Is it not a fact that 90 per cent. of the people want that influx stopped? Let us see how we are going to attain that end? Let us be reasonable, and look into the party led by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and the party led by Mr. Borden. The one or the other will control the destinies of the Dominion for the next five years."

A voice: "What about Joe Martin's party?" (Laughter.)

Mr. Cowan: "If Joe Martin were of a party that was likely to control the destinies of the Dominion for the next five years then there might be a reason for his candidature." (Laughter.)

"In 1894 there was in Japan a wonderful awakening. The Japanese entered into a treaty with Great Britain, into a treaty with the United States,

and into treaties with European powers other than Britain. The treaty with Great Britain provided that the self-governing colonies belonging to Great Britain might become parties to the treaty if they wished. In 1895 the Home Government asked the Canadian Government, which was at that time a Conservative Government, if Canada wished to accede to this treaty. The answer given by the Ottawa Government in 1895 was that we in Canada would become a party to that treaty, if, and only if, Canada were allowed to retain the right to exclude Japanese laborers and artisans. That was in 1895. In 1896, on the 22nd day of June, there came the day when the people of Canada saw fit to put the Conservative party out of power.

A voice: "Hear, hear."

Mr. Cowan: "That one voice is a good index of what the 26th of October is going to bring us." (Laughter. "On the 22nd of June, 1896, Sir Wilfrid Laurier went into power. On October 8th, 1896, Japan agreed that Canada might become a party to the treaty, and retain to herself the right to exclude Japanese laborers and artisans. We all remember that in 1897 the Japanese began to come in in great numbers, and the B. C. Government memorialised Ottawa to pass some law restricting the immigration to this country of Japanese laborers. In the year 1900 it became worse and worse, and in the first four months of that year 4,669 Japanese landed on our shores. Two thousand residents of British Columbia petitioned the Ottawa Government to take some measures to restrict it, or to prohibit it altogether. In 1903 Ottawa was reminded by Consul-General Nosse that Japan was willing that Canada should become a party to that treaty and retain to herself the right to keep out artisans and laborers. But another important event occurred at that time. The Liberal party, till then, had done nothing to implement its pre-election pledges. Every pledge made to the people in 1896 has since been fully, and completely and entirely broken. Realising that it would have to do something to retain the confidence of the Canadian people, the Laurier Government, in 1904, said they would build the Grand Trunk Pacific. On that cry they went to the country, and on that cry alone. In order to advance the interests of this creature of theirs they found it would be necessary to have not only money from the Old Country, but cheap labor. Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Ottawa Govern-

ment got busy, and in June, 1905, they cabled the Home Government: 'We want to become a party to the treaty with Japan.' On the 14th day of July, 1905, the Colonial Minister, Mr. Lyttelton—and I will have something later to say about the attitude of the Colonial Office to Canada in this matter—cabled back: 'What about the stipulation the Conservative Government made in 1895, that Canada should retain the right to keep out Japanese laborers and artisans?' The remainder of that month passed without reply from Ottawa to London. August passed, and on the 5th of September the Governor-General of Canada wired London: 'Our premier is pressing that Canada should be admitted to the treaty with Japan.' Next day Mr. Lyttelton, the Colonial Minister, cabled back: 'What about my cable of 14th July? Do you want to retain for Canada the right to keep out of Canada Japanese laborers and artisans?' That was on 6th September.

On 6th September, when Mr. Lyttelton cabled to Ottawa asking if they wanted to retain to Canada the right to keep out Japanese artisans and laborers, what should have been Canada's reply? Should it not have been 'Yes, we want to keep them out?' Answer me that. (Yes, yes.) Tell me if I am not right in saying that that should have been the answer. We should have said, 'Yes, we want to keep them out,' but the 25th day of September was a black letter day for Canada, just as the 26th day of the present month will be a black letter day for the Ottawa Government. (Applause.) The reply came from Ottawa: 'No, we don't want to retain the right to keep out the Japanese laborers and artisans.' (Shame.) Honest men, and I believe the majority of men are honest, will say that was a fatal mistake, that it was a mistake that will tell against the citizenship of Canada, not only in this generation, but in many generations to come. That mistake has made the Japanese question a momentous question in Canada, a question that will outlive every man and woman in this room, a question that will live long after we have passed from this mortal scene. (Applause.)

We have heard time and again that the Home Government was not looking after the interests of Canada in the matter of her treaties, but here was a case where the Home Government begged Canada to be dignified and reserve that right to protect her laboring citizens which any dignified nation should reserve for herself. But what happen-

ed? Why, with precipitate haste, with unseemly haste, the Ottawa Government went into this treaty with Japan, and in January, 1907, the treaty was ratified by Parliament without this saving clause. By the first of October, 8,125 Japanese had landed upon our shores—twenty times the increase of the white population. If that ratio was to continue, in ten years the population of this fair province of British Columbia would be three parts Asiatics and one part whites. (All Japs.)

Then, on 7th September, last year, we had the anti-Asiatic riots. The Ottawa Government professed to get busy, and they sent Mr. Lemieux over to Japan, to drink Japan's tea and wine, and to get a most marvellous letter from Count Hayashi. (Laughter.) That letter was most interesting. He came back telling us that he had secured a *modus vivendi*, as he called it, but, with a little change in the wording I would call it a *modus moriendi*, a 'mode of death' for Canada. (Laughter.) He thought it would be interesting to read this letter which the Laurier Government valued so much and treasured so highly from Count Hayashi. Here it is. It is dated at Tokyo, 23rd December, 1907, and says:

'In reply to your note of even date, I have the honor to state that although the existing treaty between Japan and Canada absolutely guarantees to Japanese subjects full liberty to enter, travel and reside in any part of the Dominion of Canada.' (Cries of boo.)

Yes, gentlemen, according to this *modus vivendi*, thirty millions of Japs have full liberty to come over here and live in British Columbia. (Shame.) And that notwithstanding the Immigration Act. This Laurier Government, these friends of labor, these leaders of Mr. McInnes, have not only a treaty with Japan, but also an immigration act. By that act a deaf Englishman coming from England will not be permitted to land in Canada. But by that treaty a deaf Japanese has full right and liberty to land in Canada. By that act a diseased Englishman coming to Canada will not be allowed to land. By that treaty a Japanese, although afflicted with the most loathsome disease, has full right to enter, travel and reside in Canada. By that act an English pauper must stay out of Canada, and every English immigrant coming into Canada must have fifty dollars in his pocket as a guarantee against his becoming a public charge. By the treaty Japanese paupers, without money and without price, are invited to enter

Canada. Worse still, while English criminals are by that act forbidden entry to Canada, the Japanese criminal, on the other hand, finds that this much lauded treaty of Sir Wilfrid's is the open sesame, is the charm which opens the fertile plains of British Columbia to him.

That is the position of the Laurier Government. You have a perfect right to ask what is the position of Mr. Borden on this question, and if I cannot point out to you that his position is in harmony with the best interests of British Columbia you have a perfect right on the 26th of October to register your vote against me.

On the 23rd of September of last year Mr. Borden appeared on the public platform in this city and said:

'The Conservative party which brought this splendid province into our great Confederation will ever maintain one supreme consideration to which all material considerations must give way; and it is this: British Columbia must remain a British and Canadian province inhabited and dominated by men in whose veins runs the blood of those great pioneering races which built up not only Western Canada but Eastern Canada; and while we recognise our duty to the great empire whose flag shall float always above us, we respectfully and loyally maintain that Canada, in a matter so vital and essential as this, must be accorded a freedom of judgment as perfect and unfettered as that exercised, not only by the other self-governing communities within the empire, but by Great Britain herself.' (Cheers.)

That was Mr. Borden's position.

A voice: "What did Mr. Borden do about the treaty?"

Mr. Cowan: "I will be glad to answer that. Mr. Borden, when the treaty was taken up by Canada, drew attention to the fact that his party, in 1895, required that Canada should retain to herself the right to keep out Japanese laborers and artisans, and in that, I think, he was right. (Cheers.) He has been hectoring and badgered and reproached for coming out to British Columbia—"

A voice: "Did he vote against the ratification?"

Mr. Cowan: "Let me answer that. There are so many things one might miss, if questions were not asked. I don't want to be misunderstood. I will not mislead any man to my knowledge. When the treaty came up for ratification in January, 1907, Mr. Borden said: This treaty does not retain to Canada