

A) REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ORIENTALS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1940

22. In the examining of witnesses the members of the Committee first directed their attention towards discovering whether, in fact, hostile feeling existed in any important degree. It became immediately apparent that there was in some quarters an active hostility towards the Japanese; and that, while many witnesses expressed a liking for them, or an admiration for their individual and national qualities, this was coupled with a greater or less degree of suspicion of the Japanese as a people and a feeling that their racial solidarity was likely in an emergency to override their loyalty to Canada and produce subversive or otherwise dangerous activities. No concrete evidence was adduced in support of this sentiment, and charges of disloyal conduct brought by witnesses against individual Japanese or groups of Japanese proved in every instance upon further examination to arise from unsubstantiated rumour and hearsay ...

... The police officers who appeared before the Committee, while in some cases they differed in their personal views on the questions at issue and in their attitude towards the Japanese as a people, all agreed that they formed one of the most law-abiding elements in the population of the Province and that they were in general industrious and inoffensive citizens.

24. Nevertheless, despite this favourable testimony, the Committee was obliged to recognize that, even granting the Japanese in British Columbia to be innocent of acts or speech conducive to suspicion and hostility, they are in fact mistrusted and disliked by many people, particularly in those districts where they are most thickly congregated. It was, therefore, necessary to discover the true causes of this ill-feeling, and this point was put specifically to every witness examined. The almost invariable reply was to the effect that the chief cause of animosity was economic. The Japanese are disliked by those whom they injure (or who consider themselves injured) in competition with white Canadians as labourers, as fishermen, as farmers, as retail storekeepers or in other occupations, where they accept lower wages or subsist on a less expensive standard. This sentiment may sometimes be justified by the facts, since it is natural for a white competitor to resent the existence of a class which appears deliberately to depress standards of income, working hours, and living conditions. But even where it is not justified, it is easily rationalized

by representing the Japanese as a community who, besides being economically undesirable, are politically dangerous.

25. It is doubtful whether these sentiments of dislike and mistrust would persist to any significant degree in times of normal economic activity and relatively full employment, unless they were kept alive and stimulated by other agencies. Unfortunately the Committee received ample evidence to show that hostility towards the Japanese has been deliberately inflamed by certain individuals for reasons which can only be ascribed to a desire for personal political advantage. While considering such practices to be objectionable at all times, and particularly dangerous in present circumstances, and, although not suggesting that to suppress those practices will remove the anti-Japanese sentiment which now exists, the members of the Committee are convinced that, as a first step towards diminishing the mutual antagonism between certain elements of the white population and the Japanese community, it is essential to prevent acts tending to create public suspicion and alarm. In this sense, the suppression of public statements arousing antagonism against the Japanese in British Columbia should be an integral part of plans for civil security and national defence

27. While there may be differences of opinion as to how far the charges levelled against the Japanese in respect of underselling and underliving their white competitors are justified, it is probable that many grievances could be removed by the proper enforcement of existing legislation, or the enactment of new laws or by-laws, which would prevent some forms of unfair competition, e.g., the custom of some Japanese food retailers of sleeping in their stores and thus reducing overhead costs for rent. In general, any policy designed to raise the standard of living and the standard of income of the Japanese would tend to narrow their competitive margin and thus to remove causes of ill-feeling against them. In this connection it was brought out clearly by the evidence of many witnesses that it is the exclusion of Japanese from one occupation after another in British Columbia which has driven them into occupations of a different grade, e.g., when driven out of the fisheries they turned to small storekeeping, tailoring, dry-cleaning, where their inexpensive standards permit them to drive out white competitors. There is no doubt that the Japanese themselves have a sense of persecution when after being excluded from one occupation they are blamed for resorting to another. The animosity of the white population thus has its counterpart in the resentment of the Japanese and it is obvious that such conditions make

for neither loyalty nor harmony. It is indeed in some respects astonishing that the native born Japanese are not more vocal and active in their resistance to the discrimination to which they are subjected. This can partly be explained by the fact that, by and large, they are at least as well off, and in most cases are better off, materially than they would be in Japan. They are, moreover, a traditionally disciplined and obedient people, accustomed to thinking in terms of the interest of their community as a whole, so that any tendency toward imprudent action can be readily held in check by the leaders of their several groups.

28. While it is probable that, given patience and the lapse of time, the most serious economic causes of ill-feeling between white and Japanese could be modified, it was clear from the statements of many witnesses that most of the occidental population of British Columbia regard the Japanese as unassimilable because of their distinctive racial character. No doubt in the most favourable conditions racial animosity might, with the lapse of time, be expected to diminish, and it is possible that such conditions could be produced by legislation, good will and individual effort. But the chief problem before the Committee was the short-term problem. It was therefore obliged to recognize that, in addition to the economic factor, racial prejudice is an important element in producing dislike and mistrust of the Japanese. It does not matter whether this racial prejudice is reasonable or not. It exists and it has to be taken into account. Moreover, the present international situation, in which Japan has declared herself on the side of the enemies of the British Empire, has in itself intensified not only national feeling but also racial feeling.

29. It was very apparent, and in this the majority of the witnesses who appeared before the committee agreed, that this complex of economic, national and racial factors has produced a dangerous situation, but it was most significant that, with one exception, all the witnesses examined, even those most hostile to the Japanese, agreed that the greater danger was to be expected not from the Japanese themselves, but from the white population, who with only the slightest additional provocation, might suddenly resort to violence against Japanese individuals or groups. The Japanese themselves are alive to this hostility, and their fear and perplexity and their natural determination to protect themselves if attacked, are further elements of danger.

30. The committee recognized that the situation in British Columbia may be further complicated at any time by acts committed outside of Canada; acts which cannot be foreseen, but

which may be intensely provocative. Any occurrence of that nature might not only provoke action against the Japanese in British Columbia, but, if there were Canadians of Japanese race serving at the time in the armed forces of Canada, they also might be in danger of attack by the less responsible element among their comrades.

31. In view of these considerations the members of the committee reached the conclusion that one of their main duties must be to point out that the first and perhaps the greatest potential source of danger is not disloyalty on the part of the Japanese in Canada but the animosity of white Canadians against the Japanese in general. The Committee's recommendations therefore deal principally with the measures which can be taken to prevent acts of hostility against Japanese resident in British Columbia. Among such measures must be included not only military and police precautions, but also the removal, so far as may be possible, of conditions likely to produce mistrust and anxiety among both the white and the Japanese populations.

32. ... While the committee is convinced that the investigation made by the Board of Review in 1938 indicated that these beliefs are, and for some years have been, unfounded, it is nevertheless true that some sections of popular opinion in British Columbia still accept the charges as true. For this and other reasons the demand for a complete registration of the Japanese population is still foremost in the minds of a considerable element in the population.

33. ... the General Officer Commanding in Chief, Pacific Command, was consulted, and stated that he was in full agreement with the Committee's view of the situation; that he had already taken, and would continue to take, all possible military precautions against civil disturbance. With regard to police precautions it is believed, on the evidence of the witnesses examined, that all police authorities in the province are fully aware of the dangers to be guarded against and have laid plans accordingly.

34. An important aspect of the problem of protecting loyal Japanese against violence is the choice of methods to be used for the purpose of distinguishing potentially hostile elements from the loyal Japanese who are legally domiciled in Canada. For this purpose, it is, in the Committee's opinion, desirable to impress upon the responsible leaders of the various Japanese communities that the wrongful act of a single Japanese would, even in present circumstances, and *a fortiori* if the international situation were to deteriorate further, imperil the lives and

property of *all* Japanese, whether loyal or otherwise; and that consequently it is their duty and in their interest to cooperate fully with the authorities by keeping a close watch on their own communities and reporting without delay any suspicious circumstances

37. Although the members of the Committee sympathize with this attitude, they are bound to consider the question in relation to other facts, and those facts are that opinion in British Columbia is on the whole against allowing persons of Japanese race to take military training or to serve in the armed forces. This opposition is based in part upon racial prejudice, as is shown by the statements of several witnesses who were offended by the prospect of white and Japanese youths being together in camp or in barracks. But what seems to the Committee to be a more valid objection was raised by those who urged that, particularly in the event of increased tension between Japan and the democratic states, the situation of Japanese Canadian youths in training or serving in military units with large numbers of white Canadians would be one of great danger should racial or national passion be aroused by some untoward incident at home or abroad. A quarrel in a canteen might lead to the gravest results to the Japanese directly concerned, and it might further set in motion currents of race hatred in other parts of the world, with the usual sequels of reprisals and counter-reprisals. Therefore, it has been decided to recommend, though most reluctantly and not unanimously, that at least for the present, Canadians of Japanese race should not be given military training (except of course the Basic Training provided for all students in public schools and universities) and should not be enlisted generally in the armed forces of Canada. Such exclusion will certainly give offence to a number of Japanese Canadians, and it would therefore be prudent to explain the Government's decision to them in a sympathetic way dwelling upon the fact ... that it is largely based upon a desire to protect and to ease the position of the Japanese themselves, and not upon any mistrust of their patriotism.

Source: "The Situation in 1940," *Report and Recommendations of the Special Committee Orientals in British Columbia*, (December 1940).