

# The Persecution of Japanese Canadians and the Political Left in British Columbia, December 1941-March 1942

WERNER COHN

## *The Persecution of the Japanese Canadians*

Japanese Canadians suffered persecutions during World War II which are now almost universally deplored in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Beginning a few weeks after Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941), 21,000 people of Japanese origin, four-fifths of them Canadian citizens, were "evacuated"<sup>2</sup> from their homes in British Columbia, deprived of their property rights, held in camps or forced to live elsewhere. Unlike Germans and Italians, who could be detained for security reasons in individual cases, the Japanese Canadians were deprived of their freedom en masse. The round-ups were performed without benefit of judicial procedure; in retrospect, it is difficult to find any justification for these actions, either in the security requirements of the time or on any reasonable grounds whatever.<sup>3</sup>

The literature describes the social and political conditions that led to these persecutions in terms of underlying racial prejudice, economic com-

<sup>1</sup> All three federal political parties have declared regret, and an official form of redress is in process as I write (April 1985); the only dissent seems to be that of the Ontario Command of the Royal Canadian Legion (see *Globe and Mail* [Toronto], 24 April 1985). The best outline of the events is contained in a brief submitted to the government of Canada by the National Association of Japanese Canadians on 21 November 1984, entitled *Democracy Betrayed — The Case for Redress*. Other accounts include Ann Sunahara, *Politics of Racism — The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War* (Toronto, 1981); W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever* (Montreal, 1978); Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was. A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto, 1976); and Forrest E. La Violette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II. A Sociological and Psychological Account*. Please see below, in the sections entitled *suppressio veri*, for a discussion of the reliability of these sources for the present purpose.

<sup>2</sup> The term "evacuation" in connection with these expulsions is a euphemism which appeared in at least one of the early official documents in 1942 (cf. Adachi, *op. cit.*, pp. 426-27) and has since been used by almost everyone who has written about the subject. But "evacuation," in ordinary usage, is something that is done for the benefit of those evacuated, as "in a removal (of persons or things) from a place or area esp. as a protective measure" (Webster's). What happened to the Japanese Canadians is the opposite.

<sup>3</sup> National Association of Japanese Canadians, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-16.

petition of the Japanese Canadians, fear of possible sabotage,<sup>4</sup> etc. There can be little doubt now that the persecutions enjoyed great popularity among Canadians, especially in British Columbia. The literature, as we shall see, emphasizes the willingness of the traditional political parties — the Liberals and the Conservatives, and cognate civic groups — to fan the flames of the prejudices and to benefit from them politically. But the leading left-wing party of the day — the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) — was equally involved in the persecutions, and this fact has been all but hidden in the literature. Moreover, the Canadian Communists stood in the very forefront of the anti-Japanese<sup>5</sup> agitators; this fact, too, has been concealed.

The Left is now widely credited with opposition to the persecutions; the true position of these parties in 1941-42 is little known and little suspected. I reproduce relevant documents here in some detail so that the reader will get not only the points of view which were held but also something of the style and quality of the reasoning that lay behind them.

### *The Communists*

The Canadian Communists were officially banned between 1940 and 1943, although their illegality was only partial; they did express themselves in various ways, most notably through the publication of the *Canadian Tribune* in Toronto. But in the period relevant for us here — 7 December 1941 (Pearl Harbor) and the weeks immediately following — there was no general Communist newspaper in the province of British Columbia as there had been before and would be again.

But there was, nevertheless, something of a flagship for the pro-Communist forces in the province: *The Fisherman*, organ of the three fishing unions that were later to merge into the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. It was then edited by John Meirte and very consistently presented the Communist Party point of view. For example, it took a neutralist position toward the war up to June of 1941, when the Germans invaded Russia, at which time it switched to strong support for the Allies.

<sup>4</sup> All such fears were entirely unfounded and unreasonable. The rumours of Japanese Canadian or Japanese American collaboration with the Japanese enemy were all based on false information and could have been seen as false by anyone willing to investigate them at the time. See Sunahara, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Audrie Girdner and Anne Loftis, *The Great Betrayal: The Evacuation of the Japanese-Americans During World War II* (New York, 1969), p. 21; William Petersen, *Japanese Americans. Oppression and Success* (New York, 1971), pp. 108 ff.

<sup>5</sup> I use "anti-Japanese" in this article to mean "anti-Japanese-Canadian."

During 1941 it frequently found occasion to support and reprint from the *Canadian Tribune* (as on 11 March and 1 July). Given the monolithic discipline of which the Communists prided themselves in this period, *The Fisherman*, within the limits we shall discuss, can be taken as a representative spokesman for the Communists of British Columbia.<sup>6</sup>

The paper's issue of 9 December 1941 — only two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor — carried a front-page editorial which was surrounded by a wide white border and took up the length of the page. The headline virtually screamed at the reader: "Cancel Japanese Fishing Licenses"; it was set in larger and darker type than any other text on the page except the masthead. The editorial read

War has come to the Pacific, suddenly and with devastating force. . . .

Driven by the increasing complexity of the impasse to which they have brought themselves by a decade of unprovoked aggression, Japan's warlords have committed the final desperate act of aggression. . . .

More so than any other section of our people, the fishermen on this coast are aware of the difficulties created by the presence here of a large Japanese population, no inconsiderable part of which is engaged in the fishing industry. They will join with the rest of organized labor in condemning any violence against the Japanese here, a majority of whom are Canadian-born or naturalized Canadian citizens. They will denounce all attempts to stir up racial prejudice. But, in the light of their own knowledge and experience, they will demand the taking of stringent precautions . . . even though such precautionary measures work hardship upon Japanese loyal to our country.

. . . The Fisherman welcomes the announced intention of defense authorities to immobilize the Japanese fleet. For this reason, The Fisherman demands that all fishing licenses issued to Japanese be cancelled for the duration. It is equally important that all Japanese be removed from the vicinity of fortified areas. . . .

The "Japanese" here were, of course, all Canadian citizens, no fishing licences having been available to aliens. *The Fisherman's* three demands — the impounding of vessels, the lifting of fishing licences, and the expulsion from western British Columbia — were all to be met by the Canadian government in due time. The arrest of the vessels took place while *The Fisherman's* ink was still wet, and the lifting of the licences followed shortly. But the removal of the Japanese Canadians from the coast was not agreed to by the government until the following February. Com-

<sup>6</sup> Mr. John Stanton, prominent Vancouver labour lawyer and close to the Communist unions at the time, feels that no editorial campaign could have been undertaken by *The Fisherman* in that period without the approval of the Canadian Communist leadership. (Interview with author, 30 January 1985.)

munist agitation for this step in early December, in its own modest way, may well have helped to bring it about.

On 16 December 1941, again as the leading front-page item of *The Fisherman*, there was an article entitled "White Operators Want Opportunity [to] Lease Japanese Boats." We see not so much politics or patriotism as an apparent desire to profit through the use of the sequestered vessels:

In order that the government's action in immobilizing the Japanese fishing fleet here may not be reflected in a reduced fish catch, white operators should be given the opportunity to lease Japanese-owned vessels from the custodian of enemy property. This is the opinion of Secretary W. T. Burgess of the United Fisherman's Union . . .

Similar business interests of Caucasian fishermen seem to dominate the front-page editorial one week later, on 23 December 1941, entitled "Japanese Licenses Must Remain Cancelled" (capital letters in the original):

. . . There is not the slightest doubt if the Japanese are permitted during the present emergency to continue fishing operations, there will be a general attitude of disgust among the fishermen in the government's failure to recognize the cancellation of fishing licenses to Japanese as a NATIONAL DEFENSE MEASURE. . . .

Japanese fishermen have been led to believe by their so-called leaders that hidden bonuses and easy credits have been extended to them as a preference over white fishermen because of their ability to produce.

. . . Time and time again they have been asked to participate in real democratic, united fronts in price negotiations and matters such as this. White fishermen in progressive organizations have been more than lenient with them. They felt that in time the second generation of Japanese fishermen would see and correct the mistakes made by their elders.

The war in the Pacific . . . has abruptly brought to a close that slow trend of events which might have created unity. . . . In the interests of the defense of Canada . . . the demand of . . . white fishermen is that all Japanese licenses must be cancelled for the duration.

The following week (30 December 1941), the campaign for the use of the vessels takes a nastier, openly racist tone in the headline "Lease Jap Fish Boats." The style is pursued in the new year (issue of 13 January 1942) in an editorial "Complain to Tokio" [*sic*]:

We have heard a great deal from the Japanese about their loyalty to Canada, especially in the "New Canadian," a second-generation Japanese publication. In fact it is becoming rather tiresome listening to it.

... instead of complaining about the "harsh" treatment they are receiving, the Japanese would do well, especially the "New Canadian," to direct their fire against the Japanese Imperial Government. They are responsible for the plight of the Japanese, not Canada ...

... The Japanese should give proof of their loyalty not by exclaiming how hurt their frustrated pride is, but by accepting in good spirit any measures the Canadian Government may deem necessary in order to protect this country from any fifth column activities or sabotage on the part of Japanese, whether Canadian born or not.

This editorial is followed by one on a different subject: "The victories achieved by the brilliant Red Army are indeed a welcome relief." But on 20 January relief is also expressed on the Japanese matter in an editorial entitled "Gov't Adopts Union Plan":

It is gratifying to note that the government adopted a plan along lines suggested by our paper with regard to the disposal of the Japanese fishing fleet. ... We commend Ottawa on the speed in declaring its attitude on the Japanese question in British Columbia. ...

While *The Fisherman* agitated against the Japanese Canadians, it had a sharply contrasting attitude toward the civil rights of Canadian Communists, some of whom were still in detention at the time. It came back to this issue on several occasions; one example is the very lengthy column on 17 February 1943, "World with Walls," an interview with C. S. Jackson by Bea Chalett.

As far as the Japanese Canadians were concerned, *The Fisherman* lost interest once the government proved determined to carry out all the steps which the paper had advocated. The Communists' national *Canadian Tribune*, meanwhile, gave its support to the anti-Japanese line in a "British Columbia Letter" of 31 January 1942, entitled "Japan's Fifth Column." But its language was more restrained and its agitation was less insistent; the same point of view, apparently in response to different types of readers, was expressed in quite different words.

### *Discussion*

The anti-Japanese position of the Canadian Communists in the period under discussion was neither traditional with them nor was it to last; it stood in some contrast to positions they took both before and after. Moreover, its peculiar style was obviously much influenced by the pressure of the Caucasian fishermen who made up the membership of the fishermen's unions.

The racial tensions among British Columbia fishermen went back to the last decade of the nineteenth century, and Japanese Canadians were competitors of their Caucasian colleagues throughout this period.<sup>7</sup> While the role of Communist trade union leaders in these racial conflicts remains to be examined in detail, there is some evidence that they tried, as a matter of overall philosophy, to curb the racism of Caucasian workers. In the months before Pearl Harbor during 1941, *The Fisherman* often urged Japanese-Caucasian co-operation among workers (3 June 1941, 5 August 1941), although such sentiments neither prevented expressions of annoyance at the Japanese for not heeding their advice, nor prevented the editors from printing the strongly anti-Japanese views of some of the paper's readers (9 September 1941). But the habit of preaching against racism is evident even in the language of the documents shown here, even when the message was one of persecution ("... denounce all attempts to stir up racial prejudice . . .," etc.). After the war, the Communist leadership of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union seems to have defended the returning Japanese Canadians more often than not, though the record does not seem altogether consistent.<sup>8</sup> In any case — and this in itself is of some importance — the Communist leadership always *professed* stern opposition to racial hatred.<sup>9</sup>

Though not integral to their political culture, the Canadian Communists' energetic support of the persecutions in 1941 and 1942 was more than a response to the local situation in the B.C. fishing industry. It was part of a deliberate effort throughout North America. We have already seen that the Toronto-based national organ of the party took the same line; and so did the American Communists.<sup>10</sup> But the situation in the United States was different for two reasons. First, there was nothing similar to the British Columbia fishing problem, so there was no audience that required the shrill racist epithets used here. The style of the American CP, therefore, was akin to that of the *Canadian Tribune* rather than that of *The Fisherman*. Second, the American Communists used a front organi-

<sup>7</sup> Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-23.

<sup>8</sup> Peter M. McLoughlin, *The Japanese and the Labor Movement in B.C.* (unpublished graduating essay, University of British Columbia, 1951), pp. 175-83. For a brief consideration of the Japanese issue during the 1920s, see Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1967), pp. 99-100.

<sup>9</sup> See the official union history by George North ("revised and edited by Harold Griffin"), *A Ripple, A Wave* (Vancouver, 1974). More about this work later.

<sup>10</sup> Petersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-81; Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?* (Middletown, Ct., 1982), pp. 143-45.

zation, the Japanese-American Committee for Democracy, to support Roosevelt's expulsion order.<sup>11</sup> It was a technique that has been frequently adapted by the Soviet government in its anti-Semitic drives: Jewish Communists are charged with the task.

It is clear that to the Communists the persecutions of Japanese North Americans fitted in with the line they had adopted immediately after the Soviet Union was invaded in June of 1941. To help the Soviet Union, the previously termed "imperialist war" suddenly became a people's war,<sup>12</sup> demanding a super-patriotic war agitation in the Western countries. In the labour unions of North America this meant a strong no-strike pledge "for the duration";<sup>13</sup> and on the west coast of North America it meant supporting and enflaming the old anti-Oriental prejudices.

### *Suppressio Veri*<sup>14</sup>

There is no mention of the party's position on the persecutions in the standard histories of the CPC or in the autobiographical writings of Tim Buck, the leader throughout this period. The plight of the Japanese Canadians during World War II is simply not mentioned in this literature. But I found three specialized sources which could hardly avoid the topic.

The first<sup>15</sup> is published by New Star Books of Vancouver, an independent left-wing group, which, at least in this publication, is supportive of the Communist leadership of the UFAWU. It makes no mention of that leadership's support of the persecutions in 1941-42; instead it shifts all blame to the right wing (p. 121):

Jan. 1942: Mass agitation for internment and deportation of all Japanese-Canadians, led by petty bourgeois organizations, "service" groups, chambers of commerce, and also by their political representatives. Austin Taylor leads the agitation by Vancouver elite.

Second, there is a pamphlet published by the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union in 1982, which lists it as one of the union's accom-

<sup>11</sup> Petersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-76; Girdner and Loftis, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>12</sup> "The Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and the change in relationships that accompanied it, changed the character of the war." Tim Buck, *Thirty Years. The Story of the Communist Movement in Canada, 1922-1952* (Toronto, 1952), p. 167.

<sup>13</sup> Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada. A History* (Toronto, 1975), pp. 148-50.

<sup>14</sup> "Suppression of the truth," i.e., the suggestion of a falsehood through leaving essential information unstated. It need not be deliberate.

<sup>15</sup> Rolf Knight and Maya Koisumi, *A Man of Our Times. The Life-History of a Japanese-Canadian Fisherman* (Vancouver, 1976).

plishments to have readmitted Japanese-Canadian fishermen after the war, after they had been "expelled from the coast in the war hysteria of 1941."<sup>16</sup> The reader is not told that it was this movement's own "hysteria" that demanded the expulsions in the first place.

Finally, the union's official history blames a rival organization, the B.C. Fishermen's Protective Association:<sup>17</sup>

The Japanese had been driven out of the industry after Pearl Harbor — the 1941 season was their last — and the injustices heaped on them brought little sympathy from their non-Japanese competitors. The BCFPA executive, in keeping with its stated policy, voted on January 3, 1942, to recommend that its members refuse to fish if Japanese were granted licenses. Its chief concern a couple of months later was how to get Japanese fishing vessels, all of which had been confiscated by federal order, as cheaply as possible. Similar sentiments existed in the United Fishermen's Union.

This booklet was published by *The Fisherman*; as we have seen, it was *The Fisherman* that agitated against the Japanese as early as 9 December 1941. The very actions for which it now accuses the BCFPA were taken by itself some time before they were adopted by the rival.

The role of the American CP in the persecutions has been told, if only briefly (see note 10), but the more flagrant case of the Canadian CP has so far been withheld from the public.

### *The CCF*

Then, as now, the socialist movement in British Columbia — i.e., the B.C. section of what was then the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and is now the New Democratic Party — differed radically from the Communists in various ways. Its structure and basic orientation were democratic. Unlike the Communists, it had no international monolithic centre to which it was beholden. Finally, while the importance of the Communists in B.C. lay in their (essentially covert) control of certain trade unions, the CCF was then, just as the NDP is now, a very important factor in the province's parliament, the Legislative Assembly in Victoria. In the provincial elections of October 1940, the CCF had obtained a third of the votes, more than any other single political party.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1930s the CCF had often supported the right of Oriental

<sup>16</sup> Geoff Meggs, *In Unity Lies Strength* (Vancouver, 1981), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> North, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: a History* (Toronto, 1958), p. 473; Phillips, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-35.



Canadians to vote (which they did not fully achieve until 1949!), and this stand was often held against it in election campaigns: "A vote for any CCF candidate in your riding is a vote to give the Chinamen and the Japanese the same voting right as you have"; "Look behind the solicitor for a CCF candidate, and you will see an Oriental leering over his shoulder with an eye on you and your daughter."<sup>19</sup> Even as the war tensions developed in 1941, right up to December, it would seem that the party was committed to a defence of the Japanese Canadians. But when the actual crisis came after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the CCF joined — and with some gusto at that — the persecutory drive against the Japanese Canadians.

The B.C. CCF had a weekly newspaper, *The Federationist*, which, like *The Fisherman*, published a front-page editorial concerning the Japanese Canadians during the week of Pearl Harbor (issue of 11 December 1941). But the tone and the apparent intent were still quite different. Where *The Fisherman* already called for persecution, *The Federationist* still asked for a measure of understanding. It warned against racial prejudice in the labour movement and in particular denounced any possible "hooliganism which hides under a cloak of patriotism." It commended the Japanese Canadians for having helped the war effort. But there is also, already, an ominous note:

In these circumstances we have one course to follow — leave to the proper authorities the task of placing under control those who are enemies of the Canadian state. If at any time it can be proved that this is not being done we are prepared to publicize the facts.

Two weeks later, on 24 December, there is an editorial entitled "Solve it Fairly." The tone is still cautious, but the government's persecutions are already supported:

That democracy for which millions are now fighting means something more than a pleasant sounding word, even in those countries where the exigencies of war press most hardly. In Canada we cannot be less fair and less tolerant than in other places less favored or more exposed to actual war horrors.

We are thinking of the local Japanese fishermen who have, for no reason of their own generation, been deprived of their livelihood, and had their boats removed from their control and custody. We are not quarreling with the government action; it is unfortunately a necessary precaution, no matter how innocent the local Japanese may be.

<sup>19</sup> Adachi, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

... the fact is that several thousand able-bodied Japanese men are more or less adrift, and both as a matter of fairness and as a matter of intelligent constructive policy these men should be employed ... the loyal Japanese will without doubt be glad to be employed constructively; the disloyal or doubtful minority can be handled by the authorities — in internment camps if necessary.

So far, only the guilty and the “doubtful” were thought worthy of punishment. But a week later, on 8 January 1942, an editorial entitled “The Canadian-Japanese” finds that the innocent, too, must suffer:

War in the Pacific, which immediately placed B.C. in the front line, at once brought to the forefront the problem of what action to take in regard to the Canadian-Japanese population so as to forestall possible subversive or fifth-column activity.

It is perplexing the authorities and troubling the public mind. It is a difficult problem for which a proper solution does not readily suggest itself. It is a problem that calls for thought, not hysteria ...

... Naturally, Japanese who are not citizens of Canada should be accorded the same treatment as the nationals of any enemy country. They should be interned. Japanese of doubtful loyalty should also be interned. On the other hand, naturalized Japanese or Canadian-born Japanese deserve more consideration, if not different treatment. ...

... It is essential to keep in mind that amongst other things we are fighting against racial persecution.

... Despite all this, we must bear in mind the tragic results of fifth column activity in Norway, Hawaii, and elsewhere. Policies evolved to avoid harsh and inhuman treatment of Canadian-Japanese and other minority groups, must not err on the side of over-leniency. It is better that a few innocent persons should suffer along with the guilty through internment than subject the great mass of the population to unnecessary risks due to insufficient precautions.

The editorial writer followed the *Zeitgeist*, no doubt, but he also took some liberties with the facts as they were clearly available at the time: “nationals of any enemy country,” i.e., Germans and Italians, were never as a group interned in either Canada or the United States; there had been essentially no “fifth column activity” that involved North American Japanese, either in Hawaii or anywhere else (cf. note 4, above).

In February and March, the CCF actually clamoured for acceleration of the persecutions. As the *Vancouver Daily Province* of 23 February tells it,

Harold Winch, opposition leader, is demanding immediate action in the removal of all persons of Japanese origin from strategic defense areas. ...

"Ottawa's inactivity amounts almost to criminal negligence in some cases," said Mr. Winch. "Japanese are still permitted to live alongside the dykes on Sea Island. . . . There is a Japanese settlement alongside the big telephone exchange. . . ."

Harold Winch's memory of the period, forty-four years later, is reported under "Memory and its Vicissitudes" below.

On 19 March 1942, *The Federationist* published its most sharply worded editorial in support of the persecutions (capital letters in the original) :

Act Now!

The removal of the Japanese from B.C. and the question of coastal defenses are two interrelated matters that are of vital importance to the Pacific coast.

We must learn the lessons of Hong Kong, Malaya and Pearl Harbor. The primary lesson can be summed up in one word — PREPAREDNESS.

First things come first — ALL JAPANESE MUST BE REMOVED FROM THE COAST FORTHWITH AND NOT NEXT SUMMER. . . .

. . . What will be the position of the thousands of Japanese in Hastings Park if Australia is invaded and a few of war's atrocities perpetrated? A permanent manning pool of Japanese in Vancouver is a potential powder keg . . .

Hastings Park was the location where Japanese Canadians from the Vancouver area were held temporarily, and the editorial writer, it appears from the context, was concerned not only for the safety of Canada but also for the inmates of Hasting Park. Many contemporary documents expressed the idea that Japanese Canadians on the Coast might be exposed to mob violence and that their safety could only be guaranteed at interior locations. Nevertheless, the references to Hong Kong, etc., make it very clear that the British Columbia socialists considered the Japanese Canadians to be a dire threat.

This editorial became the subject of a discussion at the meeting of the CCF provincial executive, held 17 March 1942, for which we have the minutes:

H. Gargrave read an editorial he had written for the coming issue of the *Federationist* and which urged the quick removal of the Japanese from the B.C. Coastal area. Mrs. Steeves wished to be sure that Japanese would be treated humanely, but felt that the editorial might help prod the B.C. Security Commission into action. Colin Cameron warned that we must not create in the public an unreasonable demand that could not be satisfied. Arthur Turner stated that as censor of editorials he was quite in favour of it running.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Archives, University of British Columbia, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection.

The acquiescence of Colin Cameron and Dorothy Steeves, both of the non-Communist left wing of the party and critical of war hysteria, is particularly interesting. Steeves later claimed that she had been a “pacifist” during World War II, sympathetic to the [Canadian] Japanese.<sup>21</sup>

The provincial convention of the CCF took place during the last week of March, and, as *The Federationist* reports on 26 March, it was decided that “we must carry out the evacuation of Japanese in our traditions and not employ Nazi methods.” The resolution was drafted and redrafted, finally declaring that “. . . it is in the public interest that this evacuation be conducted speedily, humanely, and with a minimum of family and social dislocation . . . under controlled conditions of productive work and settlement for the duration of the war.”

A year or so later, Grace and Angus MacInnis, both prominent CCF leaders, published the remarkable pamphlet “Oriental Canadians — Outcasts or Citizens?”<sup>22</sup> The casual reader may get the impression that the authors here issued a call for tolerance and against racism, and that is how they themselves seem to have thought of it. They report, for example, that “the Mounted Police failed to discover a single act of sabotage on the part of any person of Japanese origin” (pp. 15-16). But when they reprint, with great approval, the “principles” adopted by the B.C. Section of the CCF at its annual convention in April of 1943, the sentiments are not — at least not in retrospect now — those of human rights advocates: . . . the CCF was in favor in evacuation of the Japanese from the protected area for reasons of defense. . . . It is . . . imperative that the Dominion Government should now plan to protect the Coast area against any sudden return of an impoverished Japanese community. . . . Years may elapse in the stabilization of affairs. . . . Eventually all matters affecting racial minorities must be dealt with as an international question at a world peace conference. . . . (p.18)

Not only were the Japanese Canadians to be kept from returning to their home communities, but any eventual restoration of their rights was put off to the indefinite future.

### *Discussion*

We have seen that the anti-Japanese position of the CCF in British Columbia in 1941 was preceded by quite a different position before Pearl

<sup>21</sup> Aural History Institute of B.C., Provincial Archives, Victoria. Interview with Mrs. Dorothy Steeves on 4 April 1973, Marlene Karnouk, interviewer.

<sup>22</sup> Vancouver, *Federationist* Pub. Co., n.d. [apparently 1944], UBC Archives, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection.

Harbor; and toward the end of the war, party spokesmen again supported the cause of franchise for Japanese Canadians and the end of all restrictions on them.<sup>23</sup> But according to all the evidence we have, the anti-Japanese position during 1941-42 enjoyed a complete consensus within the party, provincially as well as federally, at least with regard to the crucial issue of expulsion from the West Coast.<sup>24</sup> We may observe in passing that in the United States, where similar persecutions were taking place, the Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas took the opposite stand: he defied the great pressures of war-time public opinion and condemned the persecutions of Japanese Americans.<sup>25</sup> Of course, the comparison is not altogether fair; the American Socialist Party had no elected representatives either in Congress or in the state legislatures and thus had nothing to lose by incurring popular wrath. Unlike the CCF, it was a very small propaganda group without any reasonable electoral prospect.

How, in view of the CCF's history and culture, can we explain its position in 1941-42? We shall come back to this question in later sections of this article, but in the meantime we may ponder the testimony of one of the key participants.

Of all the socialists in British Columbia, Grace MacInnis<sup>26</sup> is undoubtedly among the most beloved and respected. Daughter (and biographer) of J. S. Woodsworth, she was well acquainted with everyone in the party leadership at the time. She was elected from Vancouver-Burrard in October of 1941 as a member of the Legislative Assembly; her husband was federal MP from Vancouver South and, as we just saw, her collaborator on the pamphlet "Oriental Canadians. . ." This is what she had to say about the persecutions when interviewed in 1973:

Well to begin with when the war came finally after Pearl Harbor, the climate was such that nobody in the NDP or CCF as it was at that time, was urging that the Japanese be left here. It would have been bloodshed and great, great trouble all around if this had been done. What our people did was to devote themselves . . . up until then we had urged complete rights and so on and we weren't going back on that. But the situation of hysteria was so

<sup>23</sup> Adachi, *op. cit.*, *passim.*, Sunahara, *op. cit.*, *passim.*

<sup>24</sup> Sunahara, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55, has interviewed David Lewis, presumably in the late 1970s, for his recollections concerning divisions within the CCF. He listed the pro-Communist forces as among the most anti-Japanese and Angus MacInnis as among the most friendly.

<sup>25</sup> Petersen, *op. cit.*, p. 75; Girdner and Loftis, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>26</sup> There are useful short biographies of all the CCF and NDP parliamentarians in British Columbia, up to 1970, in Daisy Webster, *Growth of the N.D.P. in B.C.* (Vancouver, n.d. [1971?]). The note on Grace MacInnis is on pp. 56-58.

great that I don't think it would have been a good idea at all to insist on them staying there because there would have been all hell to pay. So what our people did was to concentrate on trying to get them removed and looked after and cared for as well as they could and given the choice of staying here [i.e., after the war — WC] if they wanted to rather than going back to Japan and doing all this sort of thing. And I think it, in the long run . . . mind you it was unjust and miserable and everything else for them and they lost a lot of their good lands and their boats and these never should have been taken away from them. And our people fought very hard to have them retained and given back to them properly at the end of the war. And all these things were wrong. But they fought very hard to do it as well as could be. And in the long run the strange thing is that, although the method was wrong and cruel and harsh and everything else, I think the Japanese Canadians have a freedom now that they wouldn't have otherwise have had. . . . Well they're full Canadians now any place in this country.

Interviewer: And you think they wouldn't have been if . . . ?

GM: No I don't think they would have had the initiative or the courage or the something to get out of this . . . to spread across the country. Yes, and my own belief is that any big group of people living together is a bad thing in a country. In other words I like to see us mixed up.

Int.: But not by force surely.

GM: No, no. No I'm not defending the way in which it was done or anything else like that. It was a choice of which of two evils was the worst. But the end result, I think, has been good.<sup>27</sup>

The reader will have to decide what to make of these explanations; the brief by the National Association of Japanese Canadians<sup>28</sup> contains many arguments against them.

### *Suppressio Veri*

The footnotes to the present article give evidence of a sizeable literature on the persecutions of the Japanese Canadians, but only in the book by Adachi is there the slightest indication that the CCF was a party to them. Citing the MacInnis' pamphlet and a short 1942 article by La Violette, Adachi devotes one half of a sentence to the problem: "even the CCF party, for some years an uncompromising champion of citizenship rights for the Japanese, expressed itself in favour of the evacuation 'for reasons of defence.'"<sup>29</sup> As for the other authors, the practice is *suppressio veri*,

<sup>27</sup> Aural History Institute of B.C., Provincial Archives, Victoria. Interview with Mrs. Grace MacInnis, conducted by Ms. Covernton, 23 April 1973; file 190, 1-2, pp. 5-6 (transcript).

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Adachi, *op. cit.*, p. 219. The book-length treatment by La Violette (*op. cit.*) gives no indication of the CCF's role in the expulsions.

whether deliberate or not. The CCF is generally praised for its devotion to Japanese-Canadian rights and instances before and/or after the crucial 1941-42 period are cited. Most typically it is Angus MacInnis with his speeches in the House of Commons, both in the 1930s and in the late 1940s, who is singled out for commendation.<sup>30</sup> And when the anti-Japanese forces are listed, the CCF is invariably left out.<sup>31</sup>

Sunahara<sup>32</sup> thus reports Grace and Angus MacInnis as supporting Japanese-Canadian rights without mentioning the stand they took in their pamphlet (pp. 54, 96). When she lists the groups in British Columbia that demanded the removal of the Japanese in early 1942 (page 34), neither the CCF nor the Communists are mentioned.

Ward<sup>33</sup> repeatedly presents lists of groups that were opposed to the Japanese Canadians:

By early January 1942 patriotic societies, service clubs, town and city councils, and air raid precaution units . . . (p. 150)

Individuals, farm organizations, municipal councils, civil defense units, constituency associations, service clubs, patriotic societies, trade unions, citizens' committees, chambers of commerce — even the Vancouver and District Lawn Bowling Association . . . (p. 151)

. . . provincial politicians, Conservative, Liberal, and independent alike. . . (p. 152)

. . . traditional social, economic, administrative, and political organizations already entrenched in British Columbia. The Provincial Council of Women, the Vancouver Real Estate Exchange, the Canadian Legion in Gibson's Landing, the Kinsmen's Club of Victoria, the North Burnaby Liberal Association, the BC Poultry Industries Committee, the Corporation of the District of Saanich, the National Union of Machinists, Fitters, and Helpers (Victoria Local Number 2), and scores of other similar groups. . . (p. 159)

Where was the CCF? Ward does not tell. He mentions (p. 164) that the provincial CCF and other left-liberal groups favoured a dispersal of the

<sup>30</sup> Angus MacInnis certainly deserves such praise for the pre-war period, but by the late 1940s (i.e., in 1949) even Alderman Halford Wilson, previously regarded as the leading anti-Japanese agitator in Vancouver, voted in favour of the franchise for Japanese Canadians. See Adachi, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

<sup>31</sup> Most standard histories of the CCF, like those of the Canadian CP, simply ignore the expulsions. But Ivan Avakumovic's *Socialism in Canada* (Toronto, 1978) suggests, in a tortuously ambiguous sentence, that which is not true, viz. that the CCF opposed the persecutions: "[The CCF leaders] did not mince their words when the authorities forcibly removed the Japanese-Canadian community from the West Coast . . ." (p. 74). Desmond Morton's *NDP The Dream of Power* (Toronto, 1974) falsifies the CCF's history unambiguously (p. 120).

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*

Japanese group throughout Canada. This is presented as a sentiment in favour of the Japanese Canadians; nowhere will the reader find an inkling of the party's demand for forcible expulsions.

Phillips,<sup>34</sup> in a book published by the B.C. Federation of Labour, devotes a paragraph to the deportations and tells us that "the CCF, both federally and provincially, objected to the treatment of these people and played a major role in humanizing the evacuation, while the government parties tried to revive the old oriental fear in the province." Not a word about the CCF's support of the expulsions; not a word about the dark reminders by *The Federationist* about "fifth column activity in Norway, Hawaii, and elsewhere."

My final citation is from Thomas R. Berger, a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of British Columbia when he wrote his book on human rights in Canada with a chapter on Japanese Canadians.<sup>35</sup> Previously he had served as provincial leader of the NDP; his official biography describes him as "a first class debater."<sup>36</sup> The chapter recounts the services of the CCF for the cause of Oriental Canadians in the 1930s (pp. 103-04). He reports a speech by Angus MacInnis in the House of Commons in February of 1941 (p. 106) in which the Japanese Canadians were defended. He reports the persecutions of the Japanese Canadians after Pearl Harbor (p. 107). He denounces Conservatives and Liberals for supporting the expulsions (pp. 108-09). On pages 111-12, he again praises Angus MacInnis, this time for a 1943 speech in the House in which the CCF MP opposed a proposal to deport Japanese Canadians to Japan. "MacInnis displayed political courage throughout his political career, but never more so than during the years when he was the lone defender of the Japanese Canadians in the House of Commons." But Judge Berger does not tell his readers that the CCF had vigorously supported the expulsions from the West Coast, nor that Angus MacInnis had co-authored a pamphlet defending this policy. Of course, Judge Berger is not alone in reporting as fact that which he would have liked to have happened.

### *The Left and Xenophobia*

The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different

<sup>34</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas R. Berger, *Fragile Freedoms, Human Rights and Dissent in Canada* (Toronto, 1981).

<sup>36</sup> Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 18.



countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. . . .

. . . The working men have no country. . . .

. . . Working men of all countries, unite!

— Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848.

At least since the days of this Manifesto there has been no blacker sin, for Socialists and Communists alike, than the sin of xenophobia. The preferred word of opprobrium, especially among the Communists, is chauvinism. Included are all forms of hatred for those of different colour, different language, different ethnicity, and lately also different sex (though not different class). Whatever may be the private feelings of people on the Left, the professed moral imperative of opposition to xenophobia has been a remarkably stable element in the socialist and communist movements for over a hundred years.

But these movements, nevertheless, have lived in a world of inter-ethnic antagonism, of wars with their attending upsurges of chauvinist sentiment, of racial persecutions and hatreds. The Left has not been unaffected by these. Marx himself wrote a violently anti-Semitic article in 1844 (before, say his apologists, he was a Marxist),<sup>37</sup> and Friedrich Engels, his life-long closest collaborator, thought that certain peoples had no right to exist — notably the Czechs and the South Slavs.<sup>38</sup> The tension between the ideal of brotherhood and the demands of prejudice, not to speak of practical politics, has been as stable as the ideal itself.

When the Marxist movement underwent its great schism into Communists and Socialists during the first two decades of this century (the split became final in 1919), both sides maintained the Marxist profession of opposition to xenophobia. But both sides were to violate this ethic from time to time.

On the Socialist side, the outstanding violation (at least in the view of critics) occurred at the outbreak of World War I. Suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, the Socialist parties of the warring countries, most notably the powerful Socialist parties of France and Germany, found that working men do, after all, have a country which they must defend. This defection from Marxist internationalism was vigorously criticized by Lenin and the

<sup>37</sup> For a description and analysis, see Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews* (East Brunswick, N.J., 1982), pp. 25-35, and the literature cited therein.

<sup>38</sup> George Watson, "Was Hitler a Marxist? Reflections about certain Affinities," *Encounter*, vol. LXIII, no. 5, December 1984, pp. 19-25.

Communists as "social chauvinism."<sup>39</sup> Communists count it as one of the causes for the great schism.

For the Communists, there are a great many examples that could be cited. One is the use of anti-Semitism by Stalin in the 1920s and 1930s in his deadly war against opponents within the Bolshevik Party.<sup>40</sup> The use of ethnic hatred by the Soviet regime in recent years, against Jews and others, is well documented.<sup>41</sup>

The role of xenophobia in Marxist-oriented Left movements, then, seems to be determined by a number of opposing tendencies. On the one hand there is the principle which is enshrined in the classic documents, and which, it seems safe to assume, plays a great role in the consciences of the more indoctrinated members. But on the other hand there are the exigencies of practical politics. For the Communists, especially during the Stalin years, the immediate needs of the Soviet Union always took absolute priority. For both Communists and Socialists, but perhaps more for the latter and all the more so if they were ensconced in parliamentary positions, the prejudices and hatreds of the surrounding electorate always had an influence.

The positions of both CP and CCF in 1941-42 in British Columbia followed the classic pattern. The anti-xenophobic principles determined the stands taken before and after the emergency. During the days immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, more practical considerations took over. The Communists saw the anti-Japanese campaign as necessary or at least useful in their drive for the all-out war effort that was helping the Soviet Union. Moreover, their base in the fishermen's unions in British Columbia would have made an anti-xenophobic stand very costly. The CCF, with a third of the B.C. electorate as its constituency, apparently felt that it simply could not afford to alienate itself from this base.

### *Memory and its Vicissitudes*

From January to March of 1985 I interviewed some British Columbians (all aged over 80 now) who are identified in the literature as having been

<sup>39</sup> This incident is taken by Communists as one of the chief reasons for their break with the Socialist International. The literature is vast. One good introduction is Merle Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935).

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Nedava, *Trotsky and the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1972), pp. 168-91.

<sup>41</sup> Again, the literature is vast. The following are samples: Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples* (New York, 1978); Hebrew University, *Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, Its Roots and Consequences* (Proceedings of a Seminar), 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1979).

friendly to the Japanese Canadians in 1941 and 1942. The people with whom I spoke had been tied to the CCF by overall philosophy and personal friendships, and I wanted to know how they had been affected by the anti-Japanese position of the party at the time. To my great surprise, not one of these people remembered the position of the party; all assumed, when I spoke to them, that the CCF had opposed the expulsions. (Grace MacInnis, as we have seen, does remember; but she had been personally involved to a much greater extent and had co-authored the party's pamphlet.)

Mildred Fahrni was a radical pacifist, a member of the religiously based Fellowship of Reconciliation. While she did not approve of the CCF's support of the war, she was a member of the party since the beginning and shared, of course, its opposition to xenophobia. She was sympathetic to the Japanese Canadians after their expulsions from the Coast. Being a trained teacher, she volunteered to teach, without pay, in the internment camp at New Denver, B.C. One would think that she might have been bitter about the CCF's support of the expulsions. I don't know whether she opposed the party's position at the time, but when interviewed now she remembers that position as having been what she would have liked it to be: an opposition to the expulsions.

I also interviewed Hugh Keenleyside and Henry Angus, both mentioned in the literature as public figures opposed to the expulsions. Their memory is as faulty as Mildred Fahrni's; both remember the CCF's position as what it was not.

Finally I spoke to Harold Winch, the provincial leader at the time, who stated that "we always took the position that the removal was unnecessary and illegal." When I read him the relevant documents he was surprised but allowed that his memory could be less than perfect.

It would seem that human memory has a tendency to reproduce the past as it makes sense to the person who remembers.<sup>42</sup> It simply did not make sense to the people I interviewed that the nice, humane, anti-xenophobic CCF could have been racist; they have known this party most of their lives; it was and still is supported by all the decent and enlightened people they know. When facts compete with what seems to make sense, the facts apparently lose out in our memories.

The *suppressio veri* which we have observed in the scholarly literature may have similar causes: the facts do not fit the mental schemes of these writers. As we have seen, the Left professes a rigorous opposition to xeno-

<sup>42</sup> Frederic C. Bartlett, *Remembering* (Cambridge, 1932).

phobia. Moreover, it often practises what it preaches. This combination of professed virtue and at least some concordant practice seems to create the mind-set that, in turn, prevents the assimilation of discordant facts.

### *Concluding Speculation*

One may speculate how things could have been if the CCF had opposed the war-time persecutions of the Japanese Canadians. The Canadian military and even the cabinet knew that there was no security need for the expulsions.<sup>43</sup> One may argue that perhaps a determined opposition by one of the country's major parties — the largest one in the key province of British Columbia — could have forestalled government action. Nor is it merely a question of the 21,000 Japanese Canadians who may have been spared much suffering and deprivation; the country as a whole need not have gone through an episode which is now regretted by all its leaders.

Of course, it is impossible to know what could have been; and in any case such speculation assumes that the CCF had the resources which Thomas Berger wrongly attributes to Angus MacInnis, "the political courage [to be] the lone defender of the Japanese Canadians in the House of Commons." It assumes that practical men of politics, planning, as they must, all the stratagems required for those extra votes in the next election, could act the role of Old Testament prophets.

<sup>43</sup> National Association of Japanese Canadians, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-16.