

The Preservation of the Peace in Vancouver: The Aftermath of the Anti-Chinese Riot of 1887

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Half a League! Half a League!
Half a League onward!
All in the peaceful city
Walked the VICTORIA specials.
Forward, Roycraft cried!
March to the City Hall he said.
In the Terminal City
Walked the brave specials.

Forward the blue coat brigade
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not, though the specials knew
The Government had blundered;
Theirs not to make reply
Theirs not to reason why;
Theirs but to loaf and cry;
Give us more Vancouver pie,
The noble specials.

The pig-tail camp to the right of them!
The CPR to the left of them!
Vancouver to the front of them!
All peaceful and calm!
Stormed at by hiss and yell!
Boldly they walked and well,
Into Water Street pell-mell
Walked the gallant specials!

Flashed all their brass buttons bare!
Flashed as they turned in air!
Withering the small boy there!
Charging on the frosty air!
While all VICTORIA wondered!
Smelling of tobacco smoke!
Right through the line they broke
News-boy and boot-black shout!
In a wild hurrah!
See the whiskey soaks! The red nose galoots!
The VICTORIA specials!¹

¹ "A Local Tennyson." Ironically, the poem was published in the *Victoria Daily Times*, 7 March 1887.

The literary antecedents of this parody are clear to all who are familiar with Tennyson's poetry; its historical origins are not. Historians have described Vancouver's anti-Chinese riot of 1887 without adequately documenting it, correctly recording its consequences or fully exploring its significance.² The riot deserves study. It was the most violent manifestation of anti-Chinese sentiment in British Columbia to that time; it illustrates the virulent inter-city rivalry promoted by the press of Vancouver and Victoria; it demonstrates the ease with which lawlessness could occur in an infant city; and it shows the determination of the provincial government to maintain an image of peace and order.

Within a few days of the riot, the provincial legislature temporarily usurped the police powers of the city. Why did the legislature, with its well-established propensity to pass anti-Chinese laws, suddenly pass an act to protect the Chinese of Vancouver from such outrages as assault on their persons, arson of their property, and intimidation designed to prevent them from dwelling in the city or following their lawful occupations there? Was the Vancouver *News* correct in charging that the "Act for the Preservation of Peace within the Municipal Limits of the City of Vancouver"³ was a Victoria plot, a "sort of sensational way of bringing the 'upstart of a city, Vancouver to book'";⁴ or was the provincial government legitimately concerned about maintaining the law?

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Hostility to the Chinese, to their alleged "unfair competition" on the labour market and to their "different" customs and habits was not confined to Vancouver. No matter where they went, the Chinese were unwelcome.⁵ In the United States, despite the suspension of legal Chinese immigration for a minimum of ten years beginning in 1882, anti-Chinese agitation persisted. In the Puget Sound cities of Tacoma and Seattle, broadly based groups of white citizens temporarily forced the Chinese out during the fall and winter of 1885-1886. In both communities, federal troops restored the peace.⁶

² The fullest description may be found in James Morton, *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains* (Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1973).

³ British Columbia, *Statutes*, 50 Vict. ch. 33.

⁴ *Vancouver News*, 13 March 1887.

⁵ See, for example, a recent study, Charles A. Price, *The Great White Walls Are Built*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974). This book endeavours to compare reactions to the Chinese in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada. Its Canadian section is weak and misinformed.

⁶ See Jules A. Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma, 1885", *Pacific*

British Columbia had known anti-Chinese sentiment since 1858 but politicians and journalists, not mobs, had expressed it. During the 1870s the provincial legislature disfranchised the Chinese but failed to discourage their immigration or to restrict their employment. The importation of thousands of Chinese coolies to help build the Canadian Pacific Railway in the early 1880s spurred the legislature to pass anti-Chinese laws. After a select committee reported in January 1884 that 16,000 to 18,000 Chinese lived in the province, the legislature passed acts to stop Chinese immigration and to place severe restrictions on the Chinese already in the province. These laws prevented Chinese from acquiring Crown land and regulated their activities by requiring them, among other things, to purchase an annual ten dollar licence which had to be shown to provincial authorities on request. The federal government disallowed the immigration law and the courts ruled the other two laws ultra vires. The aborted laws had one positive result for the legislature: they commanded Ottawa's attention. Sir John A. Macdonald, responding in a now traditional way, appointed a royal commission to investigate Chinese immigration. Subsequently, the federal government passed the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, imposing a fifty dollar head tax on every Chinese entering Canada and limiting the number of immigrant Chinese each ship could carry. The tax increased government revenues (the provincial government received a quarter of the proceeds) but it did not halt Chinese immigration.⁷ Moreover, as construction work on the CPR ended, Chinese labourers were laid off. Many of them went to Victoria, where they formed such a large pool of unemployed labour that the *Vancouver Herald* claimed there were more adult Chinese males than adult white males in the capital city.⁸

Vancouver residents did not want Chinese in their new city. This was clear in the local press. As early as January 1886, the *Herald* warned the presence of Chinese in the business section would lower property values. The *Vancouver World* echoed similar views by describing the reported

Historical Review, vol. XXIII (1954), pp. 271-283, and "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle, 1885-1886", *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, vol. 39 (April 1948), pp. 103-130. Although there are many parallels between these riots and the riot in Vancouver, I have not been able to trace any direct links.

⁷ This abbreviated account of British Columbia's attitude to Chinese immigration before 1885 can be supplemented through several secondary sources. The most recent and most comprehensive is W. P. Ward, "White Canada Forever: British Columbia's Response to Orientals, 1858-1914", Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 1972.

⁸ *Vancouver Herald*, 21 May 1886.

sale of two city lots to Chinese as “a violent wrench to public sentiment”. When a small group of unemployed Chinese tried to establish themselves in business in the city, the *Vancouver Daily Advertiser* protested this “thin edge of the wedge”. The *Morning News* well summarized local opinion when it urged that the Chinese be kept out to spare Vancouver “the evil which has cursed all Pacific coast towns”. To the many citizens who did not want the Chinese to settle in Vancouver, the virtual destruction of the city by fire on 13 June 1886 offered a second chance to keep them out. During the week after the fire, three street meetings passed resolutions against allowing the Chinese to re-establish themselves. Nothing came of these motions, although Mayor M. A. MacLean, a real estate man, and Alderman L. A. Hamilton, the CPR’s chief surveyor, supported their principles. In November, the Knights of Labor stirred up agitation against the employment of Chinese. Mysterious caution signs appeared on the windows of houses employing Chinese and on the sidewalks in front of stores and offices whose proprietors dealt with the Chinese in any way. Responding to manifestos issued by the Knights and by the Wintners’ Association during the civic election campaign in December, both Mayor MacLean and his rival, Alderman Thomas Dunn, a hardware merchant, opposed the presence of Chinese in the city and agreed on the difficulty of keeping them out.⁹

Some Vancouverites believed it was possible to keep the Chinese out. During the first stage of the Chinese outrages in January 1887 they used intimidation, inviting new Chinese arrivals to return to Victoria and promoting a boycott of Chinese labour. Intimidation had no permanent results. The arrival of more Chinese in late February marked the beginning of the second and violent stage of the outrages. A mob marched on the Chinese camp, demolished it, and ordered the Chinese to go. This violence led to direct provincial intervention — the “Act for the Preservation of Peace within the Municipal Limits of the City of Vancouver.”

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The immediate impetus to the Chinese outrages was the arrival from Victoria early on 7 January 1887 of a “batch of Mongolians”. They were the first of an expected 250 Chinese hired by John McDougall, a con-

⁹ *Vancouver News*, 7 December 1886; 8 January 1887; *Vancouver Herald*, 15 January 1886; *Vancouver World*, 2 April 1886; *Vancouver Daily Advertiser*, 2 June 1886; *Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser*, 26 November 1886; *Vancouver Weekly Herald*, 22 June 1886; *Vancouver Morning News*, 2 June 1886. The most outspoken anti-Chinese candidate for municipal office, R. D. Pitt, was badly defeated when he ran for an aldermanic seat in Ward III.

tractor, to clear the Brighthouse estate, a 350-acre plot of land covered with stumps and inflammable material. McDougall explained that Chinese labour saved him 50 per cent or \$1.25 to \$1.50 per man per day. This did not satisfy the several hundred unemployed white men then in Vancouver.

The intimidation stage of the Chinese outrages began on 8 January 1887. A group of self-proclaimed "representative and business men" [*sic*] under the chairmanship of R. D. Pitt, a real estate agent and member of the Knights of Labor, met at City Hall. The anti-Chinese meeting decided to have a committee induce the Chinese "to return to the place from whence they came" and to offer them "fair and just compensation" for their expenses. The money would be raised by public collection. Another committee would urge employers to replace Chinese workers with white ones in order to make Vancouver "for all time to come . . . the first and only city on the Pacific Coast in which Chinese did not form a large and very unwelcome population". The meeting named a ten-member committee which included prominent citizens such as Mayor MacLean, Alderman Joseph Humphries, Thomas Dunn and A. G. Ferguson, "a capitalist", to carry out its intentions. A second committee composed of the mayor, W. Brown and J. J. Blake, a stipendiary magistrate, would call on employers. The committees were clearly designed to represent a cross-section of the community but not all of those named agreed to serve.¹⁰

The day after the meeting, a Sunday, a crowd composed of seventy-five members of the committee (the press did not explain its growth) and 250 others descended on the Brighthouse estate at Coal Harbour and persuaded nineteen Chinese to accept a free one-way trip to Victoria. A collection was taken up to pay their fares, and 600 residents — a "quiet, unanimous and orderly" assemblage — watched their departure. Police Chief J. M. Stewart reported no violence but the *Victoria Times* noted the Chinese lost several hundred dollars worth of property. The departure of these nineteen Chinese and of others who left on their own for New Westminster or who joined the exodus to Victoria on succeeding days came to be known as the "expulsion of the Chinese". Each time a group

¹⁰ Other members of the committee were: Hugh Keefer, a contractor; T. D. Cyrs, the proprietor of the Granville Hotel; Captain J. M. Ayers, who, if not a member of the Knights of Labor, was sympathetic to its cause; Thomas Stephenson; G. Goodmurphy; and J. C. Huntley. Mayor MacLean later denied acting with the committee. Keefer and Ferguson were not present at the meeting and Ferguson inserted an advertisement in the *News* (15 January 1887) stating that he had been named to the committee without his knowledge or consent. Huntley later declined to serve.

of Chinese sailed for Victoria, a crowd cheered their departure. On the sixteenth, Provincial Police Superintendent H. B. Roycraft, who came to Vancouver to investigate the situation, informed the Attorney-General that the city was "remarkably quiet", that there had been no evidence of violence and that the crowd had been good-humoured.¹¹

The departure of the Chinese did not end the anti-Chinese movement. Within ten days of the initial "expulsion" there were four well-attended anti-Chinese public meetings at City Hall. These meetings echoed the popular feeling that the Chinese must not be allowed to establish themselves in Vancouver, but speakers and the Vancouver newspapers repeatedly emphasized the importance of avoiding violence. Such admonitions were especially timely since an anonymous part of the movement, "The Vigilance Committee", began posting notices warning that:

all Chinamen must leave the city limits on or before the 16th January instant, and all Chinamen found within the city on or after that date will be forcibly ejected and their goods and chattels moved to False Creek or such other places as convenience may dictate. And we warn the authorities not to interfere with us if they value their lives, as we mean business and are determined in our action.¹²

The same committee also circulated letters advising city residents "to extend your patronage no longer to Chinamen". Public meetings fully endorsed this idea. At a meeting on the fourteenth, the 200 "businessmen and citizens" present signed a pledge not to employ Chinese for any purpose or to deal with them directly or indirectly, effective 1 February 1887. Emphasizing the non-violent aspect of the intimidation, the pledge suggested the imposition of the boycott might be delayed until a joint stock company (then being organized by white men) had purchased all Chinese property in the city. A few days later, however, white crosses appeared on buildings where Chinese were employed. The persistent popularity of the anti-Chinese movement was also demonstrated on 20 January when rumours circulated that the Chinese would be returning on the morning steamer. Three hundred men sped to the wharf to prevent their landing, but no Chinese were on board.¹³

¹¹ *News*, 11 January 1887. J. M. Stewart, Chief of Police, and Sgt. John McLaren to H. B. Roycraft, 16 January 1887, Provincial Archives of British Columbia (hereafter PABC), Attorney-General's Papers (hereafter AGP), Letters Inward, 1884-7; *Victoria Daily Times*, 10 January 1887.

¹² *New Westminster British Columbian*, 11 January 1887. *The Victoria Daily Colonist*, 15 January 1887, quoted a similar but slightly more emphatic notice.

¹³ *Times*, 14 January 1887; *Colonist*, 21 January 1887; *News*, 15 and 21 January 1887.

During the uneasy calm that followed the expulsion of the Chinese, small businessmen and transients replaced the more prominent members of the community as members of the anti-Chinese committees. Only R. D. Pitt provided some continuity between the first and second phases of the anti-Chinese agitation. Although he specifically denied leading the movement which he described as a spontaneous growth, Pitt presided at several public meetings at City Hall. At one of these gatherings, held on 2 February 1887, the decision was made to form an Anti-Chinese League. Developing the earlier idea of a boycott, this League distributed to business houses a card bearing a pledge not to deal directly or indirectly with Chinese labour. The League also appointed a committee consisting of: Pitt; T. D. Cyr, a hotel keeper; John Mateer, a contractor; and two others, including the secretary, George Pollay, whose names do not appear in the city directory. Several speakers underscored the absence of "leading" citizens by complaining that the prominent citizens who claimed to sympathize with the anti-Chinese movement were not present. Two weeks later, Pollay told another meeting that the majority of businessmen had signed the anti-Chinese pledge but some thought the wording, "not to deal directly or indirectly", too strict. This meeting also heard that at least 100 Chinese had entered the city during the previous three weeks. The Chinese had not been permanently expelled.¹⁴

On Thursday, 24 February, Vancouver residents learned that Chinese had again come from Victoria to clear the Brighthouse estate. That afternoon, a placard reading "The Chinese have come [*sic*] Mass meeting in the City Hall to-night" was carried along the streets. An overflow crowd heard unidentified speakers claim that city businessmen had agreed to assist workingmen in keeping the "city clear of celestials". At the meeting's end a voice in the audience called for "those in favour of turning out the Chinese tonight". The crowd responded unanimously, left the hall, and, singing "John's Brown Body", "trudged its way through the snow with remarkable rapidity" to the Chinese camp at Coal Harbour. There the 300 to 400 members of the mob kicked some Chinese and ordered all of them to leave. As the Chinese prepared to go, the mob began demolishing the camp, pulling down shanties, smashing outfits and throwing bedding and provisions in the fire.

When the mob was about to leave, Police Chief Stewart and Superintendent Roycraft arrived. Roycraft had had an agent at the meeting but had not expected trouble for several days. Roycraft and Stewart im-

¹⁴ *News*, 3 and 16 February 1887.

mediately took charge and instructed the Chinese to remain in a roofless shed. Stewart then ordered the mob to go home but it paid no attention. The mob met briefly and, in unison, answered "Aye" to two questions: "Who says the Chinese must go?" and "Who says the police must go home?" When a call went out, "Come and drive them out," the mob moved towards the Chinese but stopped short of attacking the law, whose forces had been strengthened by the arrival of the other three members of the city police force. The mob then began to drift home although, en route, some of them raided Chinatown, where they looted houses and set fire to some buildings.¹⁵ Many Chinese escaped to the bush; a few went into the water where they almost died of exposure. About eighty-six, including some from a camp at False Creek, left for New Westminster. According to the *News*, few Chinese remained in the city, but by the twenty-sixth another twenty-four had arrived from Victoria. They escaped molestation only by delaying their debarkation until after the 200 members of the Anti-Chinese League had left the CPR wharf.¹⁶

The darkness of the night impeded the work of the police in identifying the culprits. Not until the second day after the "outrage" did they lay any charges, and then they arrested only three men: John Frauley, a logger; Thomas Greer, a milkman; and O. Lee Charlton, a clerk. The city's police magistrate, T. T. Black, denied them bail but stipendiary magistrate J. J. Blake freed them on \$3,000 bail. A few days later they appeared in court before Mayor MacLean, Alderman R. H. Alexander and Black. Their cases were dismissed because eyewitnesses could not state that any of them actually took part in the assault. Indeed, Charlton reminisced, "they just arrested us to save their face."¹⁷

In the meantime, the provincial government had taken control. Asserting that a "reign of terrorism" that might easily spread to other cities must be put down, that local justices and magistrates could not be trusted, and that "the parties charged with the police protection of the city were not only afraid to enforce the law but were in sympathy with the agitation," Attorney-General Davie introduced legislation to preserve the peace in Vancouver. Specifically, the bill authorized the cabinet to appoint spe-

¹⁵ This account is based on the following reports: *News*, 25 February 1887; Roycraft to A. E. B. Davie, 25 February 1887, PABC, AGP, Letters Inward, 1884-7; and J. S. Matthews, comp. "Early Vancouver", Vancouver City Archives, typescript vol. I, p. 298. Roycraft enclosed a clipping of the *News*' account with his report. He described it as "most truthful" and explained that *News* reporters had had a better chance to observe the incident than he had.

¹⁶ *News*, 25 and 26 February 1887.

¹⁷ *News*, 27 February and 4 March 1887. See also the conversation of Charlton with J. S. Matthews, 11 February 1941, in Matthews, "Early Vancouver", vol. VI, p. 73.

cial constables in Vancouver, to turn the city gaol over to the Provincial Superintendent of Police and to suspend the judicial powers of the local magistrates and justices of the peace, including the mayor, as long as a provincial stipendiary magistrate might be within the city. So little did Davie trust the Vancouver magistrates that he admitted one of his reasons for not following the extreme course of calling out the militia was that such an action would require a magistrate's signature. Although some members of the opposition criticized details of the measure, especially the obligation imposed on the city of having to pay the costs of the special constables, the legislature unanimously and quickly passed the bill.¹⁸ Vancouver did not lose its charter, but it did lose its police powers temporarily.¹⁹

Most Vancouver citizens believed the mob's action was unwarranted and that the lawlessness must be put down.²⁰ Nevertheless, the government's action incensed them. According to a special correspondent of the *Victoria Times*, groups of excited Vancouver residents could "be seen congregated at every street corner discussing the all absorbing question". These citizens "were paralysed with astonishment at the audacious conduct" of the provincial government in making "a direct insult to the city and its citizens", and "an open menace to civil rights". Vancouverites complained the government seemed to think that "everything and everybody in the province should be governed by Victoria City and Victorians". A special meeting of the Vancouver City Council passed a resolution complaining of the practical annulment of its powers over law and order and of the "enormous expenses" of placing the city under control of persons not responsible to the city. City Council declared that no special legislation "for the protection of life or property in the city is necessary", that the council was prepared "to take all steps for the protection of persons of all nationalities", and that the cabinet should not enforce the act until the mayor and council showed themselves "unable and unwilling" to enforce the law.²¹ In response to a message from John Boulton, a lawyer who interviewed the Attorney-General on the city's behalf, the council made plans to appoint twenty specials of its own and announced that in

¹⁸ *Times*, 28 February 1887; *Colonist*, 1 March 1887.

¹⁹ For recent examples of this misinterpretation see Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: B.C. Federation of Labour, 1967), p. 14; Ward, "White Canada Forever", p. 104.

²⁰ *News*, 26 February 1887; *Colonist*, 27 February 1887; *Times*, 28 February 1887.

²¹ *Times*, 1 March 1887; Vancouver City Council, Minute Book, 1 March 1887, Vancouver City Archives (hereafter VCA).

future a special posse of police would attend every public meeting not sanctioned by the mayor, aldermen or justices of the peace and would arrest anyone who would incite illegal or unpeaceful action. But the province was already recruiting the thirty-six special provincial police whom it despatched to Vancouver on 2 March in company with Superintendent Roycraft and A. W. Vowell, a stipendiary magistrate.²² At the wharf in Vancouver, a crowd met the specials and followed them to City Hall but attempted nothing unlawful. The mayor gave Vowell the key to the gaol and other city officials were co-operative.²³

Once the "Victoria specials" arrived, the city dismissed the twenty constables it had sworn in. Council decided each alderman should supply the names of four individuals who could serve in case of emergency. Although this would have provided a maximum force of forty, nearly 100 "leading businessmen" were sworn in as specials a few days later. The realization of the property owners that they could not afford to tolerate lawlessness, the appointment of ten extra regular city policemen and the prevalence of peace convinced Vowell that Vancouver could maintain the law itself. On 10 March, fourteen of the specials returned to Victoria. On the eighteenth, Vowell returned the gaol keys to the police chief and joined the last of the specials as they departed for Victoria. Yet despite the attempts of James Orr, one of the MLAs for New Westminster District, the government refused to repeal the law relating to the preservation of peace in Vancouver until the legislative session of 1888.²⁴

The presence of the specials permitted the return of the Chinese. About 100 arrived on 8 March to join the thirty who were already in the city. During succeeding days, additional Chinese entered Vancouver. By 15 March, eighty Chinese were working on the Brighthouse Estate and ninety were at other locations in the city. The Chinese were apparently able to work without overt molestation. The only reported incident was a brief strike by the Chinese themselves against a shortage of camp cooks and the high prices charged by the contractors for provisions and other supplies. By mid-July the Chinese work force at the Brighthouse estate, which had once numbered 300, had declined to three. An injunction, not against the Chinese as such but against the danger of clearing land in hot

²² *News*, 2 March 1887. Original correspondence in City Clerk's Correspondence, VCA, RG2 A1, vol. II.

²³ A. W. Vowell to Attorney-General, 3 March 1887, PABC, AGP, Letters Inward, 1884-7.

²⁴ *News*, 3 and 5 March 1887; Vowell to A. E. B. Davie, 15 March 1887; PABC, AGP, Letters Inward, 1884-7. The law was repealed at the 1888 legislative session. British Columbia, *Statutes*, 51 Vict. c. 38.

dry weather (a hazard of which Vancouver was acutely conscious), forced them off.²⁵ The Chinese did not leave Vancouver. Chinatown became a distinct feature of the city's cultural landscape but for many years remained a target of racial hostility. In the short run, however, Vancouver was as much concerned about the apparent revenge of Victoria as it was about its own ethnic composition.

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The arrival of the "Victoria specials" in Vancouver had provoked a new outburst of popular resentment against the capital city.²⁶ Many Vancouverites believed their city was subject to the whims of a legislature controlled by a jealous city of Victoria and they resented the fact that many Victorians were absentee landowners in their city. Sentiments similar to those expressed in the opening parody appeared in the satirical journal, *The Vancouver Chestnut*, which, during its brief life, devoted itself to attacking Victoria and especially John Robson for sending the specials to Vancouver. The daily *Vancouver News* challenged the accuracy of Victoria newspaper accounts of the attacks. It blamed "the influence of Victorians, which has always been exercised against Vancouver" for the reprehensible, rash and ill-advised conduct of the legislature in passing the preservation-of-the-peace act.²⁷

The rivalry of the two cities grew out of the island-versus-mainland conflict which dated back to colonial times and which had been rekindled with the debate over the location of the CPR route through the province. Victoria was naturally jealous of the new city of Vancouver which, as the future terminus of the transcontinental railway, seemed destined to supplant the capital as the commercial metropolis of the province. Victoria, as the *News* indicated, still dominated the politics of the province with eight of the province's twenty-seven MLAs elected for the city or adjacent areas while Vancouver lacked a single MLA to call her own. Since the preservation-of-the-peace legislation was a political act, the Vancouver press could easily perceive it as a Victoria plot. It was easy for Vancouverites to confuse Victoria the city with Victoria the seat of government.

The first Victoria reports of the expulsion of the Chinese in January

²⁵ Vowell to Davie, 8 and 15 March 1887, PABC, AGP, Letters Inward, 1884-7; *News*, 25 and 27 March 1887; *Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser*, 10 June 1887; 21 July 1887.

²⁶ The *Colonist* (8 March 1887) reported that merchants had introduced a form of boycotting against the specials by charging them especially high prices for provisions.

²⁷ *News*, 2 March 1887.

had sympathetically remarked on the absence of violence. Then, the Vancouver *News* blamed the "mossbacks" of Victoria for launching a suit against the mayor and other citizens implicated in the expulsion and for appealing to the supreme court for an injunction restraining Vancouver citizens from similar acts in the future. The suit, in fact, was launched by a Chinese labour contractor, Lee Shaw, whose men were working for McDougall. The only apparent Victoria connection was a Victoria lawyer, Thornton Fell, whom Lee Shaw engaged to act on his behalf. After contractor McDougall went to Victoria to seek the support of the Attorney-General for criminal action against the members of the committee responsible for expelling the Chinese, the newspaper battle intensified. The *News* accused the Victoria press of "gross exaggeration" and "enormous lying" while the Victoria journals complained of the Vancouver papers "pouring out the vials of their wrath" and of making "libellous and absurd statements" about the veracity of the Victoria press. According to Victoria reporters who interviewed McDougall, the Vancouver police had been unable or unwilling to cope with the mob, there had been violence, and Mayor MacLean and Alderman David Oppenheimer had looked on with open approval as a large portion of the city's "floating population" had "hustled the Chinese in every conceivable way". In an editorial, "Rule of the Mob", the *Times* complained that the majority of the respectable portion of the population unfortunately "hold themselves aloof, and thereby tacitly acquiesce in the actions of the mob, which is directed chiefly by demagogues and hoodlums". McDougall denied having implicated Alderman David Oppenheimer²⁸ and the *Colonist* later reported that the mayor and other prominent citizens had taken no part in the proceedings. Getting in a final word against the *News*, the *Colonist* blamed it for giving "unnecessary and undue prominence to the whole affair".²⁹ Whoever's fault it was, the damage had been done. Despite subsequent press denials and private reports of Superintendent Roycraft to the Attorney-General that there had been no violence, there was a popular impression abroad in Victoria that violence had been used and that the Vancouver authorities were unwilling or unable to cope with the mob or protect the Chinese.

Thus when Attorney-General Davie introduced the bill to preserve

²⁸ Illness had confined Oppenheimer to his bed on the night of the expulsion.

²⁹ *News*, 16 January 1887; *Times*, 14 January 1887; *Colonist*, 14 and 20 January 1887. The *Columbian* also criticized the *News*' claim that no compulsion was imposed on the Chinese (22 January 1887). The *News* (25 January 1887) merely commented that it had always thought the *Columbian* was anxious to get rid of the Chinese.

peace in Vancouver he referred to his uncertainty about the unwillingness of civic authorities to enforce the law. Later, in responding to the City Council's formal complaint against the measure, the government repeated its belief that civic authorities had "strangely and persistently" refrained from enforcing the law.³⁰ Even discounting journalistic rhetoric, the government's conclusions were reasonable. The Vancouver City Council took no steps to halt the agitation; indeed, many of the anti-Chinese rallies were held in City Hall with the council's permission. Mayor MacLean looked on the expulsion without acting against it, though he later denied being a member of the original anti-Chinese committee. At its first meeting after the expulsion, the Vancouver City Council did not consider the expellers but passed resolutions to enforce the cubic air bylaw (designed to prevent overcrowding in Chinese quarters), to put down Chinese houses of prostitution and to impose a poll tax on "every Mongolian". Later the council asked the province to appoint a commission of inquiry into the "alleged Chinese riots or outrages" but nothing came of this.³¹

The province was also justifiably uncertain about the city's law-enforcement agencies. When contractor McDougall appealed to the police chief at the time of the expulsion, the chief merely ascertained that all but a few of the Chinese were anxious to go to Victoria. Claiming he could prove no intimidation, he did nothing. Even if the police had wanted to halt the agitation, they lacked any real power. The city's entire police force consisted of four men. Only after the province announced the despatch of special police to the city did Vancouver arrange to swear in special constables of its own. City police only charged three men with participating in the 25 February attack on the Chinese, and though one other magistrate denied them bail, Blake — a stipendiary magistrate, member of the original anti-Chinese committee and partner of the lawyer of one of the accused — granted it.

In proposing the bill, Davie expressed his hope "for the credit of British Columbia" that the mob were not citizens of the province but transients from such Puget Sound centres as Seattle and Tacoma.³² Supporting this

³⁰ John Robson to T. F. McGuigan, 5 March 1887, VCA, RG2 A1, vol. 2. *News*, 15 March 1887. Robson also mentioned an incident the previous September when civic officials made no attempt to punish those who had been responsible for the tarring and feathering of a Vancouver resident. I have not found any other references to this incident.

³¹ *News*, 11 January 1887; Vancouver City Council, Minute Book, 14 March 1887.

³² The *Colonist* (27 February 1887) and the *Times* (28 February 1887) shared this view.

“alien” theory, D. W. Higgins, the member for Esquimalt, said he had heard on “good authority”³³ that R. D. Pitt, the leader of the agitation, was a Fenian who had headed a group in Portland, Oregon, which sought to blow up the Esquimalt dockyard. Such an allegation is virtually impossible to substantiate. What is surprising is that none of the legislators tried to link the outrages with the Knights of Labor, despite their well-known antipathy to Chinese competition.³⁴ Pitt, who denied the leadership of the anti-Chinese movement in Vancouver, took pride in being one of the Knights of Labor whose members, he boasted, included two-thirds of Vancouver’s people. Undoubtedly Pitt was not the only Knight to be involved in the Vancouver agitation, but the legislators’ ignoring of the Knights, who would be ideal alien villains, suggests that the Knights, as an organization, played little or no part in the outrages.³⁵

Although some prominent citizens were linked with the early stages of the agitation, they do not appear to have played an active part in its violent stage. They passively looked on as the anti-Chinese agitation developed. Many were sympathetic to the idea of keeping the Chinese out of the city; some of them pledged not to deal with Chinese. Those who might have been concerned about peace and order lacked an effective means of doing so. The business community itself was still transient. Many of its members were preoccupied with getting their own businesses underway and they lacked any form of organization. The Board of Trade, for example, was not established until September 1887.

Except for two of the men arrested, the mob which carried out the expulsion was a faceless one. Indeed, Charlton and Greer may have been chosen for arrest simply because the police recognized them by name.³⁶

³³ The “good authority” may have been a letter from “Commercial Traveller” to the editor of the *Colonist*, 20 January 1887.

³⁴ During most of 1886, the Knights published a weekly newspaper, the *Industrial News*, in Victoria. “Being a labour paper,” it was “of necessity . . . a strong anti-Chinese journal.” (*Industrial News*, 26 December 1885). The Knights’ manifesto in the Vancouver municipal elections of December 1886 included a strong anti-Chinese statement.

³⁵ Pitt to editor, *News*, 21 November 1886. Some writers on B.C. labour history have assigned a significant role to the Knights in developing agitation in Vancouver. For examples, see George Bartley, “Twenty-Five Years of Labor Movement in Vancouver”, *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 December 1912, and William Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, [Vancouver, 1937], p. 32.

³⁶ Charlton was born in New Brunswick in 1865. He arrived in Vancouver on 13 September 1886 and remained there until 1926, when he moved to Celista, B.C. He was a member of the CCF from its inception. When he died in 1962, Grace MacInnis spoke at his funeral. (*Salmon Arm Observer*, 23 August 1955 and 5 April 1962).

Negative evidence suggests the mob was largely made up of transients. They were, no doubt, typical young men of the frontier cut "adrift from the order imposed by kinship and association" who had already given Vancouver a reputation for having a rough element.³⁷ Whether the mob came from Puget Sound, from Victoria (as the Vancouver press suggested) or from elsewhere is not as important as the fact that the mob committed outrages.

Speaking on behalf of the legislation, John Robson, who subscribed to the alien theory, declared that the Vancouver bill gave British Columbians an opportunity "to show to the nations of the earth that we were Britons and not in name alone". The government was determined to maintain British standards of justice.³⁸ In the context of British Columbia's past attitudes towards the Chinese, it seems at first sight rather odd that the Chinese should benefit from such concern.³⁹ Other factors must be considered. Robson, no lover of the Chinese,⁴⁰ had a personal interest in halting the intimidation. He was, along with the CPR, one of the several owners of lots in the Brighthouse estate. It was to his personal advantage to have the land cleared as quickly and as cheaply as possible.⁴¹

While such a personal consideration may have been in Robson's mind, the government's main reason for passing the law was the preservation of the peace in a new city whose law enforcement was uncertain and whose population was unknown. Six weeks later, the legislature amended Vancouver's charter by raising the property qualifications for mayor, alderman and municipal voters. Protecting the Chinese was an incidental con-

Greer arrived at Burrard Inlet in May 1882. He remained in Vancouver until his death in 1943. VCA, J. S. Matthews Collection, "Thomas Greer".

³⁷ A. R. M. Lower, *Canadians in the Making* (Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1958), p. 360; *Times*, 6 May 1886.

³⁸ *News*, 3 March 1887; *Colonist*, 1 March 1887.

³⁹ For several years, beginning in 1887, the legislature was less active in passing anti-Chinese legislation. See Ward, "White Canada Forever", ch. V.

⁴⁰ In 1872 Robson was one of the first MLA's to suggest the imposition of special taxation on the Chinese and a ban on their employment on public works. Nevertheless, on another occasion he argued that Chinese would not be mistreated, that regardless of creed, colour or nationality, "a man's a man for a' that." *Dominion Pacific Herald*, 12 March 1881, quoted in Ivan E. M. Antak, "John Robson: British Columbian", M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1972, p. 138.

⁴¹ According to the *Vancouver Herald*, the owners of the Brighthouse property were: E. G. Major and Ben Douglas of New Westminster; Messrs. Oppenheimer and Sam Brighthouse of Vancouver; John Robson, G. Byrnes, C. T. Dupont, I. W. Powell and Mr. Devlin of Victoria; William Hailstone of England; Mr. Bullen of Montreal; N. R. Reid of Cariboo; J. Morton of Chilliwack; and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. Quoted in the *Victoria Weekly Times*, 18 March 1887.

sequence of the government's determination to avoid any appearance of a "wild west" or of "frontier democracy" in British Columbia. As Robson implied, the province needed to maintain a good image. The Canadian Pacific Railway had just been completed; the province was anxious to attract settlers and capital. British Columbia could not afford such publicity as a report in the *New York World* that if the Chinese had not left in January, the agitators "had everything in readiness to blow up portions of the town" or cables from England asking Vancouver residents, "Are you safe?"⁴² The goal of showing that government advertising was correct⁴³ — that British Columbia was not a lawless frontier — was accomplished. In eastern Canada, at least, newspapers and periodicals commented on the effectiveness of the legislature in dealing with the emergency.⁴⁴ The outrages had shown that the Canadian frontier was not a uniformly peaceful one; the provincial government, however, demonstrated that violent acts would not be tolerated. The provincial government, if not the city, was capable of acting decisively to preserve the peace.⁴⁵ The "Act to Preserve the Peace in Vancouver" was not, as newspaper rhetoric claimed, merely a Victoria plot. It reflected a legitimate concern for justice and for the reputation of the province as a whole.

⁴² *New York World* quoted in *Vancouver News*, 10 March 1887; *News*, 3 March 1887.

⁴³ See, for example, *Illustrated British Columbia* (Victoria: J. B. Ferguson, [1884]), p. 274.

⁴⁴ *Montreal Witness*, quoted in *Colonist*, 29 March 1887; *Monetary Times*, quoted in *Columbian*, 31 March 1887.

⁴⁵ The city later accepted some responsibility for damage to Chinese property.