

# The British Columbia Franchise and Canadian Relations with India in Wartime, 1939-1945<sup>1</sup>

J. F. HILLIKER

Canada's early relations with India, James Eayrs aptly remarks in *Peacemaking and Deterrence*, were dominated not by a spirit of "entente" and "co-operation" but by "the desire to keep Indians out of Canada."<sup>2</sup> The reason for this preoccupation lay in the unpopularity of the small "East Indian" community in British Columbia and the importance which racial questions assumed in the politics of that province. As a result, then, of domestic circumstances, relations with India during the first four decades of this century affected Canadian external policy chiefly as a source of embarrassment over discriminatory practices, of which denial of the franchise in British Columbia became an irritant of even greater proportions than restrictions on immigration. The commencement of war in 1939 complicated this situation, for it accentuated the injustice of the franchise restriction and at the same time stimulated nationalist demands for independence in India, which in turn required a more comprehensive Canadian policy towards the subcontinent. The deepening of racial tensions in British Columbia after Pearl Harbor, however, made it difficult for federal politicians and civil servants to deal with the first problem, with results that hampered their efforts to make a positive contribution towards resolution of the second.

At the beginning of the war, most persons of Indian origin in Canada lived in British Columbia, but even there they were of little importance numerically — the total for the whole country in 1941 was only 1,465. It was instead within the context of race relations in the province that the community assumed significance. Indians — mostly Sikhs — were the smallest group of immigrants from Asia and the last to arrive. They

<sup>1</sup> In an earlier and rather different form, this article was given as a paper to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for Asian Studies at Laval University in June 1976. I am grateful for advice and assistance to F. J. McEvoy, Patricia Roy and Douglas Waldie. The views expressed are mine and not necessarily those of the Department of External Affairs.

<sup>2</sup> James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: Peacemaking and Deterrence* (Toronto, 1972), p. 226.

began to appear in large numbers in 1906, by which time, after nearly half a century of immigration from China and Japan, there was considerable racial tension and the provincial government had begun a series of attempts — always disallowed by the federal authorities — to pass exclusion laws. Acceleration of immigration from Asia, combined with the reservation by the Lieutenant-Governor, James Dunsmuir, of the most recent exclusion bill, heightened racial feeling in 1907, and in September of that year riots broke out in Vancouver. One of the immediate causes was Indian immigration: the arrival of several hundred Sikhs who had been expelled from the United States and rumours that more were to come direct from India.<sup>3</sup>

The Vancouver riots highlighted the two aspects of race relations in British Columbia which were of most concern to the federal government: their domestic political importance and their effect on international relations.<sup>4</sup> Most closely involved with both questions was Mackenzie King, the Deputy Minister of Labour, who was sent to England to seek voluntary restrictions on Indian emigration and to British Columbia to investigate the immigrant traffic. In his reports, King declared that Canada should remain “a white man’s country” and he endorsed the comforting belief that exclusion would benefit Indians as well as Canadians: the climate of the new land, he said, was unsuitable, and immigration, promoted for profit by steamship companies and the employers of cheap labour, was unjust not only to the host country but to the Indians themselves.<sup>5</sup>

King’s conclusions were to say the least politically convenient, and certainly did not challenge the racial attitudes which had given rise to

<sup>3</sup> Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto, 1958), pp. 281, 299-306, 320-21, 349-50; Mary E. Hallett, “A Governor-General’s Views on Oriental Immigration to British Columbia, 1904-1911”, *BC Studies* 14 (Summer 1972): 56-61.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Avery and Peter Neary, “Laurier, Borden and a White British Columbia,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* XII (1977): 24-34; and Howard H. Sugimoto, “The Vancouver Riot and its International Significance,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* LXIV (1973): 163-74.

<sup>5</sup> *Report by W. L. Mackenzie King, C.M.G., Deputy Minister of Labour on Mission to England to Confer with the British Authorities on the Subject of Immigration to Canada from the Orient and Immigration from India in Particular* (Ottawa, 1908), pp. 7-10; W. L. Mackenzie King, *Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Methods by which Oriental Labourers Have Been Induced to Come to Canada* (Ottawa, 1908), pp. 75-80; Eayrs, *Peacemaking and Deterrence*, p. 226. King was also charged with recommending compensation to the Chinese and Japanese residents who had suffered property damage in the riots of 1907.

the crisis.<sup>6</sup> Yet King displayed an open and indeed sympathetic attitude towards Indians in their homeland when he was exposed to the broader international context of the problem. That happened in 1909 when, soon after he had made the transition from civil servant to politician, King visited the subcontinent en route to Shanghai to represent Canada at a conference on the opium traffic. He was distressed by the economic and social conditions he observed, but just as much by racial discrimination as practised by the British, and he concluded that India must eventually have self-government. In their own country, Indians seemed to King to be involved in a struggle similar to that of his grandfather, William Lyon Mackenzie, in Canada, and he gained from his travels in 1909 a life-long sympathy with Indian nationalists, particularly Congress.<sup>7</sup> Thus by the time he returned to Canada King had developed two points of view, essentially incompatible, which were to affect his wartime policy — sympathy with national aspirations in India combined with a conception of political realities in British Columbia which encouraged insensitivity to the interests of Indians living there.

Although Mackenzie King displayed a discreet interest over the years in the constitutional evolution of India,<sup>8</sup> it was the domestic problem which dominated his approach to events there, and that of most other Canadian politicians as well. At first, restrictive immigration policies, highlighted by the notorious *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914, were the chief cause of embarrassment in external relations, but that issue became less important after the Imperial War Conference of 1918, when Sir Robert Borden agreed to the admission of spouses and unmarried minor children of Indians already in Canada.<sup>9</sup> In the inter-war years the focus of criticism shifted to the denial of full citizenship rights to Indians in British Columbia. Most serious was the withdrawal of the provincial franchise in 1907; the same disability had been imposed earlier on Chinese and Japanese, but it seemed especially unjust to Indians because they were natural-born British subjects. Since almost all the Indians in Canada

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Henry Ferns and Bernard Ostry, *The Age of Mackenzie King* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 81-91.

<sup>7</sup> Hallett "A Governor-General's Views," pp. 70-71; Eayrs, *Peacemaking and Deterrence*, p. 228; J. W. Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record*, vol. I (Toronto, 1960), p. 408; R. MacGregor Dawson, *William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography, 1874-1923* (Toronto, 1958), pp. 192-95.

<sup>8</sup> Malcolm MacDonald, "King: The View from London," in John English and J. O. Stubbs, eds., *Mackenzie King: Widening the Debate* (Toronto, 1977), p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Eayrs, *Peacemaking and Deterrence*, p. 227; *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, vol. 1 (Ottawa, 1967) pp. 352-53.

lived in British Columbia, it was little consolation that the other provinces did not follow suit, and the grievance became worse under the Dominion Elections Act of 1920, which denied the vote to all persons disfranchised by provincial legislation except for veterans of the Canadian forces in the First World War.<sup>10</sup>

With British Columbia politicians between the wars bent on "educating" eastern Canada about the anxieties of the province, the leaders of both the main federal parties were kept aware of the political significance of the franchise question; the Liberals, indeed, considered that they could gain a good deal of political advantage by exploiting the issue when a third party, the CCF, began to support extension of the franchise in the mid-1930s.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Indian and British pressure on Ottawa had no effect. The British Columbia government's only concession to the excluded communities was belatedly to follow the example of the Dominion Elections Act by granting the provincial vote to veterans of oriental race in 1931. The beneficiaries of that measure, however, were not Indian but Japanese.<sup>12</sup>

The outbreak of war in 1939 forced the federal government to consider more closely the ramifications of the condition of Indians in British Columbia. The stimulus was provided by the presence in Ottawa of D. P. Pandia, a member of Congress and a former secretary of Gandhi, to press for favourable treatment of a number of illegal immigrants from India. On September 1, the day Germany invaded Poland, Pandia expressed confidence in India's loyalty to the empire and in the willingness of Canadians of Indian origin to join this country's forces.<sup>13</sup> These statements may have helped remind the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, O. D. Skelton, of the "profound and disturbing" effect in India of the *Komagata Maru* affair at the start of the First World War; to avoid creating such trouble again, Skelton persuaded the Direc-

<sup>10</sup> John Norris, *Strangers Entertained: A History of the Ethnic Groups of British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1971), p. 232; A. R. M. Lower, *Canada and the Far East — 1940* (New York, 1940), p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia E. Roy, "Educating the 'East': British Columbia and the Oriental Question in the Interwar Years," *BC Studies* 18 (1973): 50-69; Carol F. Lee, "The Road to Enfranchisement: Chinese and Japanese in British Columbia," *ibid.* 30 (1976): 46. On the early support of the CCF for extending the vote to Indians, see Khalsa Diwan Society of Victoria, *Report on Dominion, Provincial and Municipal Franchise for the Hindus in British Columbia* (Victoria, 1947), pp. 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> See Forrest E. LaViolette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II: A Sociological and Psychological Account* (Toronto, 1948), p. 299.

<sup>13</sup> *Victoria Times*, 1 September 1939.

tor of Immigration to suspend deportation proceedings against the illegal immigrants.<sup>14</sup>

Within a few months, Skelton's success in dealing with the immigration question was offset by the more intractable problem of the franchise. The war lent added credence to the arguments for extension, for it could be claimed that Indians had earned the right to vote through their loyalty as members of the imperial forces in both the present and previous conflicts.<sup>15</sup> This matter, however, could not be dealt with as discreetly as illegal immigration, and it was difficult to face openly because of the growing intensity of anti-Japanese feeling in British Columbia even before Pearl Harbor:<sup>16</sup> if the vote were given to Indians, the claims of natural-born and naturalized Canadians of Japanese and Chinese origin would also have demanded consideration.

It soon became apparent that concern about the franchise would have a marked effect on Mackenzie King's approach to the constitutional future of India. So long as it was kept separate from the domestic issue, he felt free to express his interest, as he did in response to a question in the House of Commons on 6 March 1940, at which time he indicated — although without commitment — that he was willing to contemplate appointing a high commissioner. He had to consider the domestic implications more closely, however, when the Secretary of State for India, L. S. Amery, suggested in November that he go ahead with the appointment in order to "demonstrate to the Indian mind the true nature of the British Commonwealth of Nations."<sup>17</sup> Skelton, although he dis-

<sup>14</sup> Public Archives of Canada (PAC), External Affairs file 60-N-39, Skelton to F. C. Blair (Director of Immigration), 9 September 1939, Blair to Skelton, 21 September 1939. Skelton pointed out that there might also be beneficial results for Canadian attempts to secure a commercial treaty with India, but little progress was made with that project despite resolution of the immigration question.

<sup>15</sup> Department of External Affairs, file 5550-40, Hardit Singh (Secretary, Victoria Branch, Canadian East India League) to King, 5 February 1940; Vancouver *Province*, 30 March 1940. Except where indicated, External Affairs records were consulted in the Department. Dr. D. P. Pandia has informed me that the Canadian East India League was a non-sectarian organization concerned to improve the condition of Indians.

<sup>16</sup> Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia, *Report and Recommendations* (Ottawa, 1941); H. F. Angus, "The Effect of the War on Oriental Minorities in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* VII (1941): 506-16; Roy, "Educating the 'East,'" pp. 63-69; Ken Adachi, *The Enemy that Never was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto, 1976), p. 189.

<sup>17</sup> Vincent Massey (High Commissioner in Great Britain) to King, 5 November 1940, in *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, vol. 7, ed. David R. Murray (Ottawa, 1974), pp. 18-19.

approved of British policy, thought such a gesture would have a good effect. But if a Canadian high commissioner were to have influence, he pointed out, the franchise question, which was especially offensive to Congress, must be resolved. King balked at that suggestion. "Let sleeping dogs lie," he wrote. "Don't raise agitation in B.C. in order to put one down in India." The Cabinet War Committee supported him and King made sure that Amery knew that the franchise problem was an important reason for the decision.<sup>18</sup>

War in the Pacific brought a deepening of racial tension in British Columbia but it also stimulated Canadian interest in India, most immediately as a result of the unhappy association of Canadian and Indian troops in the fall of Hong Kong.<sup>19</sup> The British, moreover, were aware that Mackenzie King, despite his coolness towards Amery's overtures, was still interested in the constitutional future of India.<sup>20</sup> Circumstances in Canada, therefore, seemed to be becoming more favourable to a positive decision on the exchange of high commissioners, and Amery broached the proposal again soon after Pearl Harbor. In Canada, reinforcement — and a reminder of the close association between the representational question and the franchise — came from another old associate of Gandhi (he had served as his secretary in South Africa), H. S. L. Polak, Honorary Secretary of the Indians Overseas Association and a member of the imperial advisory committee of the British Labour Party. In the course of a lecture tour of Canada, Polak, like Pandia before him, sought to defend India's war effort, which had been called into question by Gandhi's pacifism and by the non-co-operative policy of Congress. His main interest, however, was the franchise, which he requested the Prime Minister to take up with the new Liberal-Conservative coalition government of British Columbia.<sup>21</sup>

Polak arrived at an opportune time so far as his dealings with the Department of External Affairs were concerned. Norman Robertson, who had succeeded Skelton as Under-Secretary, and H. L. Keenleyside,

<sup>18</sup> Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, memorandum for Prime Minister, 20 January 1941, King to Massey, 5 February 1941, *ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>19</sup> In an effort to counter the effect of bad race relations engendered by the war, Canada initiated an exchange of messages with the government of India about the fall of Hong Kong. File 2670-40, note for N. A. Robertson (Under-Secretary), 3 December 1941, Secretary of State for External Affairs (SSEA) to Viceroy, 23 December 1941, telegram.

<sup>20</sup> MacDonald, "View from London," pp. 43-44.

<sup>21</sup> File 5550-40, Polak to King, 11 December 1941; *Vancouver Province*, 14 January 1942.

the Assistant Under-Secretary in charge of the American and Far Eastern Division — both of whom had grown up in British Columbia — were sympathetic with Polak's aims, as was another Assistant Under-Secretary, L. B. Pearson, responsible for the Commonwealth and European Division. Even more important, the communications prepared for the Prime Minister in response to Polak's approach were the work of H. F. Angus, a University of British Columbia professor on wartime duty with the Department, who had a long-time interest in resolving the problem of the oriental franchise.<sup>22</sup>

Angus dealt with Canada's relations with India in two memoranda, confining his attention in the first to the franchise. Pointing out that the Indian community in British Columbia was small and, since immigration had been cut off, unlikely to grow significantly, Angus favoured enfranchisement as a "graceful gesture" which would remove a "political grievance" in India, albeit one "grossly exaggerated in the course of political controversy." While he admitted that concession to the Indians would in the long term require similar action for the Chinese and Japanese, he thought that that might be delayed until the end of the war. Since Polak was understood already to have approached the coalition leaders, Angus recommended that the federal government raise the matter with Premier John Hart, in the interest of improving India's relations with Canada and the the rest of the Commonwealth.<sup>23</sup>

Angus treated the exchange of high commissioners in his second memorandum. Canada, he argued, might play a "unique part" in resolving the Indian problem. He considered India to be facing two major political difficulties, "the attainment of satisfactory international status" and "the evolution of a political system which can combine respect for the appropriate autonomy of territorial and religious minorities with national unity." Angus saw in India a "dangerous tendency" to stress the first objective at the expense of the second. Canada, on the other hand, had had much experience in dealing with the two together. Since Canada was neither imperialistic nor anti-British, a high commissioner would be well regarded by all sides and, so long as he were sympathetic without being meddling, would be well placed to share the benefits of his national experience.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Roy, "Educating the 'East'," p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> File 5550-40, Memorandum for the Prime Minister concerning the East Indians in British Columbia, n.d.

<sup>24</sup> File 11004-40, Memorandum for Prime Minister, n.d.

Angus's memoranda went forth with the support of Robertson, Pearson and Keenleyside.<sup>25</sup> At first, prospects seemed encouraging. King sent Polak a friendly if non-committal reply, decided on an approach to the government of British Columbia, and indicated interest in the appointment of a high commissioner. Polak received a sympathetic hearing from Hart and some members of his cabinet and from the Lions and the Rotarians of Vancouver.<sup>26</sup> In the end, however, his mission was defeated by the negative aspects of the Canadian response to the outbreak of the Pacific war: the British Columbia cabinet concluded that no change could be made<sup>27</sup> and King, because of "recent developments in the general Oriental position on the Pacific coast," decided not to intervene. While he did not specify what those "recent developments" were, the Prime Minister presumably had in mind the pressures which led to the federal government's announcement, on 27 February 1942, of plans to evacuate all persons of Japanese origin from the coastal regions of the province. "Under the circumstances," wrote Keenleyside to Polak, "I am afraid there is nothing very much that we can do except to endeavour to obtain a favourable decision" on the appointment of a high commissioner.<sup>28</sup>

Within weeks of the disappointing conclusion of Polak's visit, circumstances in India offered an occasion for achieving Keenleyside's second objective, the exchange of high commissioners. Even more important, they were sufficiently urgent to encourage Mackenzie King to examine India's problems against a broader background than the politics of British Columbia and to attempt to influence constitutional advance in the subcontinent. These developments resulted from the rapid succession of British defeats in the Far East after Pearl Harbor, which rendered India itself vulnerable and made urgent the political deadlock caused by the refusal of Congress to co-operate in the war effort and the insistence of other groups, particularly the Muslim League, on recognition of their interests. Early in March 1942, the British decided to issue a statement guaranteeing India dominion status with the right to secede, if it chose,

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Pearson, memorandum for Robertson, 3 January 1942; file 5550-40, Robertson, memorandum for Prime Minister, 3 January 1942.

<sup>26</sup> File 5550-40, King to Polak, 3 January 1942, marginal notes in Angus's memorandum for Prime Minister, n.d., Polak to King, 6 and 14 January 1942.

<sup>27</sup> PAC, King Papers, Primary Correspondence, vol. 331, Hart to Polak, 6 January 1942.

<sup>28</sup> File 5550-40, Keenleyside to Polak, 21 February 1942. On the evacuation of the Japanese, see W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal, 1978), pp. 142-66, and Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*, pp. 199-224.



from the British Commonwealth. After the war, an elected "Constitutional making body" would be established to draw up arrangements for self-government, which the British promised to accept on three conditions: any province of British India should have the right to reject the new constitution; there should be a treaty between the British government and the constitutional making body; and the princely states should determine individually whether or not to adhere to the new constitution.<sup>29</sup> Since the proposal involved a change in the Commonwealth, the Dominion Prime Ministers were consulted. Canadian support was perhaps especially important, for Confederation was a precedent for Amery's idea of allowing provinces and states to decide for themselves on adhering to an Indian union, as a means of getting around communal and regional differences.<sup>30</sup> But the British regarded the problem as essentially between themselves and the Indian leaders and made it clear that what they wanted from the Dominions was approval, not reflective comment. "I trust," said the Dominions Secretary in his circular telegram, "you will find no difficulty in [the] statement from your point of view."<sup>31</sup>

Despite the Dominions Secretary's urging, King used his request to take initiatives which, while they met a minor British objective — agreement to the exchange of high commissioners — carried the much less welcome suggestion of disruptive outside intervention. At the outset, King's boldness was actuated by his alarm at the course of events in Asia, which had been heightened as a result of a recent visit from T. V. Soong, the Chinese Foreign Minister. Soong, the brother-in-law of Chiang Kai-shek, told King that the generalissimo had formed a very unfavourable impression of British policy when he had toured India and had come to the conclusion that the offer of self-government was the only means of encouraging resistance to Japanese aggression. That the United States shared Chiang Kai-shek's view was indicated by Lauchlin Currie, President Roosevelt's administrative assistant, who was a member of Soong's party.<sup>32</sup> Apart from his concern over the general fortunes of

<sup>29</sup> King Papers, Primary Correspondence, vol. 333, Dominions Secretary to SSEA, 4 March 1942, Circular Telegram no. D. 121.

<sup>30</sup> Amery to Churchill, 25 February 1942, in *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power, 1942-1947*, vol. I, ed. Nicholas Mansergh and E. W. R. Lumby (London, 1970), p. 240; note on declaration of policy, n.d. (28 March 1942), *ibid.*, p. 520; statement by Amery to Ministry of Information press conference, 7 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 670.

<sup>31</sup> King Papers, Primary Correspondence, vol. 333, Dominions Secretary to SSEA, 4 March 1942, Circular Telegram no. D. 120.

<sup>32</sup> King Diary, 28 February 1942.

the Allies, King could find reason in domestic politics — involving but also transcending the situation in British Columbia — to want improvement in India. For the Indian question arose at the same time as the deliberations preceding the conscription plebiscite of 1942, when the Prime Minister — who later indicated unwillingness to send troops to India to help the British keep the peace there<sup>33</sup> — was especially sensitive to the effect of the war on regional differences in Canada. If India, weakened by internal division and constitutional dispute, became more vulnerable to attack, British Columbians might well demand that Canada send troops to fight against the Japanese. To opponents of conscription in Quebec, on the other hand, such action would seem even more objectionable than participation in the war in Europe, since it would involve Canada directly in the preservation of British imperial power.

In view of the anxieties which had been raised during Soong's visit, Mackenzie King welcomed the opportunity to act when he received the Dominions Office telegrams of March 4; indeed, he was "greatly afraid the British [had] left this matter too late." In the Cabinet War Committee, he "urged strongly our endorsing self-government for India, agreeing at once to go as far as Britain would be ready to go," and supported the appointment of a high commissioner "to indicate our friendly attitude toward equality of status."<sup>34</sup> The War Committee agreed and, on March 6, King sent two messages to Churchill. The first welcomed the British statement "heartily," urged "the utmost expedition" in promulgation, and offered early appointment of a high commissioner if it would help "to signalize India's emergence as an equal member of the Commonwealth." The second discussed Chiang Kai-shek's diagnosis of the Indian situation, including his view that Hindu-Muslim differences had been much exaggerated as an obstacle to self-government. Pronouncing himself "much impressed" by this analysis, King once again urged early action on the proposed declaration. In reply, Churchill dismissed Chiang as "blissfully ignorant about Indian affairs" and mistaken in the belief that "Gandhi and Nehru were the only people who mattered." While disclaiming any difference with King on policy, he warned that timing had been affected by the deteriorating military situation and that he was pessimistic about Congress's reception of the constitutional proposals.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> J. W. Pickersgill and D. F. Forster, *The Mackenzie King Record*, vol. II (Toronto, 1968), p. 116.

<sup>34</sup> King Diary, 5 March 1942.

<sup>35</sup> King to Churchill (via Dominions Office), 6 March 1942, telegrams no. 73 and 74, Churchill to King (via Dominions Office), 8 March 1942, telegram no. 58, in *Transfer of Power*, vol. I, pp. 349-50.

Two days later, the British informed the Dominions that they had decided against publishing the declaration and instead would send the Lord Privy Seal, Sir Stafford Cripps, to India as a "Special Emissary of the War Cabinet" to seek the agreement of the Indian leaders.<sup>36</sup>

Churchill's assessment of the situation in India can hardly have been reassuring to the Canadian Prime Minister, and in the days that followed his anxiety was reinforced by discussions with the Indian trade commissioner in Canada, the War Committee, and Princess Alice, the wife of the Governor-General. At the same time, the trade commissioner discounted Churchill's warning about the complexity of Indian politics by offering the assurance that the Muslim community — the most obvious source of opposition to Congress — was loyal to the British and so by implication likely to accept direction from them.<sup>37</sup> Thus King was encouraged to press on with efforts to promote a solution and to regard Congress — long his favourite party in the subcontinent — as the single significant voice of Indian nationalism.

Soon Mackenzie King's ideas received reinforcement from more exotic sources, his dreams, or "visions," and a series of coincidences in his daily routine. Most notable among the latter were the receipt of a letter of encouragement from a well-wisher in Vancouver, King's examination of a "secret box of personal belongings" containing newspaper articles on William Lyon Mackenzie and Nehru, and the appearance on March 14 of an article on the Indian leader in the *Ottawa Journal*.<sup>38</sup> While King had renounced, for the duration of the war, his consultation of spiritualist mediums, he had never ceased to draw inspiration from chance occurrences of this kind and, when he set them within the context of his more conventional activities involving India, beginning with Soong's visit, he was profoundly impressed. There was, he concluded, a "close parallel" between Mackenzie and Nehru, suggesting that if King could communicate with the latter "in the right way" he might be able to stabilize the situation in India until after the war was over, at which time self-

<sup>36</sup> King Papers, Primary Correspondence, vol. 333, Dominions Secretary to SSEA, 10 March 1942, Circular Telegram no. D. 134.

<sup>37</sup> King Diary, 10, 11, and 12 March 1942.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 and 15 March 1942. King's correspondent did not deal specifically with India, nor was the Prime Minister impressed by the fact that he was from British Columbia, the source of his difficulties in formulating policy about India. Instead, it was the name of his business firm — Flash-a-Call Inter-Communication Systems — which struck King. This, combined with his interpretation of his dreams, contributed to his conviction that the key to the solution of the Indian problem lay in proper communication, specifically between himself and Nehru.

government would be obtained "through Canada's determination to see that this is achieved for her as part of the new world order." By the time he was ready to act, the Prime Minister had concluded that involvement with India might be "the most significant mission of my life, linking my grandfather's sacrifices in establishing self-government in Canada with the realization of self-government for the people of India."<sup>39</sup>

In view of T. V. Soong's role in the chain of events leading up to King's decision, it was not surprising that he was selected as the channel of communication with Nehru. On March 15, King telephoned Soong, who was resident in Washington, with a message to be relayed to Nehru through Chiang Kai-shek. As the grandson of William Lyon Mackenzie, King promised that he would do all in his power to bring self-government to India; in particular, he was willing to back up any promises that Cripps might make, and was sure that the other dominions and the United States could be persuaded to do the same. King was pleased to find that Soong was receptive to his request and took further encouragement from the belief that his handling of another problem, conscription, might benefit his efforts with regard to India. "In this connection," he confided to his diary, "I have thought many times of the significance of the plebiscite. In giving an undertaking to India the present government could be cited as one that attaches importance to its word."<sup>40</sup>

King followed up his telephone conversation with a letter to Soong and wrote as well to Lauchlin Currie, suggesting that the United States and "other of the United Nations" might back up British guarantees to India of independence after the war.<sup>41</sup> He also let Churchill know of his call to Soong and suggested that the Cripps mission should be "fortified by an expression from each of the self governing Dominions of their readiness to co-operate at the time of peace negotiations in insuring immediate recognition of India's status as one of equality." In this communication, he showed more sensitivity than previously to Churchill's opinions for, on the advice of Robertson (who otherwise "strongly ap-

<sup>39</sup> King Diary, 13 and 14 March 1942. On King's reasons for his actions, cf. Eayrs, *Peacemaking and Deterrence*, pp. 234-35. Two possibilities suggested by Eayrs, a desire to forestall involvement by the CCF and King's fondness for the role of intermediary between the United States and Britain, are not mentioned in the Prime Minister's writings about this episode. The CCF, moreover, did not take a position on the events of March 1942. King's spiritualism and related activities during the war are discussed in C. P. Stacey, *A Very Double Life: The Private World of Mackenzie King* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 190-204.

<sup>40</sup> King Diary, 15 March 1942.

<sup>41</sup> King Papers, Primary Correspondence, vol. 322, King to Currie, 16 March 1942.

proved" the message), he deleted reference to Nehru, about whom the British Prime Minister "had not expressed himself too favourably." In addition, King pointed out that he was confident his scheme could be accomplished without "any public discussion or debate."<sup>42</sup> That provision, however, may have been as much for his own benefit as for Churchill's, since it would avoid the risk of undesirable political repercussions arising from open controversy in British Columbia.

At the time of King's intervention, Canadian views were likely to get a careful hearing in London, for Lord Durham's report of 1839 on government in this country was considered an important precedent for the Cripps mission.<sup>43</sup> Yet in attempting in effect to internationalize the Indian problem, King was betrayed by his enthusiasm for Congress into taking an oversimplified view of the politics of the subcontinent and underestimating the depth of Churchill's feeling on the subject. One reason may have been lack of independent information, for Canada House did not supply him with regular reports on India. Yet much was known from other sources, most notably the Dominions Office, and it seems that in the excitement of the moment King failed to read between the lines of messages from London — and, except for Robertson's warning against mentioning Nehru, that officials were no more alert than their chief.<sup>44</sup>

Any illusions that King and his advisers may have harboured of an easy solution through Canadian intervention were soon dispelled. Churchill quickly expressed his disapproval of the Canadian proposals, which he thought ignored the realities of the Indian situation. The problem, he said, was not between the British government and India but internal to the subcontinent, in the conflicting interests of Congress — which had rejected dominion status — the Muslims, the princes and the untouchables. Any suggestion of handing over power during the war — which Churchill evidently believed King's ideas would encourage — would disrupt the Indian army and make defence impossible. He therefore strongly recommended that King do nothing until the results of the

<sup>43</sup> File 11004-40, SSEA to Dominions Secretary, 15 March 1942, telegram no. 79; King Diary, 15 March 1942.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, "The Cripps Mission to India, March-April 1942," *International Journal* XXVI (1971): 341.

<sup>44</sup> Mansergh asks whether King was "diplomatically dissembling, naively unaware, or wholly uninformed by Vincent Massey of Churchill's ambivalent attitude . . ." *ibid.*, p. 345, n. 21. All three possibilities seem valid but, as King's diary makes clear, they do not tell the whole story.

Cripps mission could be judged.<sup>45</sup> Amery, although he agreed with Churchill, found his reply “somewhat blunt” and considered the Canadian move “generous and helpful.” Accordingly, he wrote a soothing letter to King in which he sought to keep alive the idea of exchanging high commissioners.<sup>46</sup> But from Ottawa there was no response, for the War Committee decided on March 26 not to name a high commissioner until the results of the Cripps mission were known.

Churchill’s sharp response did not — as Eayrs has suggested — end King’s wartime interest in the future of India, nor did it reassure him about the wisdom of British policy.<sup>47</sup> What it did was to encourage him to greater caution in his efforts to influence events. One reason, no doubt, was recognition that there was nothing to be gained from a prolonged and public rift with Churchill, but another may have been concern about the state of opinion in British Columbia. At the time he was considering the Indian situation, King received a letter from Bruce Hutchison of the *Vancouver Sun* about the sense of alienation in the province, and a short while later he had a similar report from the Governor-General, who had been there on tour. Both dealt with local concerns about the state of preparedness against the possibility of attack from off-shore, but the Earl of Athlone also remarked on the continuing spirit of racial tension.<sup>48</sup> Public Canadian involvement in plans for the future of India might well have drawn international attention to the continuation of discrimination in British Columbia — attention which, given the mood of the province, would have been resented there.

In view of the information he was receiving from British Columbia, King can have taken little comfort from the response of Chiang Kai-shek to his recent activity. Like Churchill the Chinese leader thought that further action should await the conclusion of Cripps’ conversations. But Chiang and his “Indian friends” welcomed what King had done and the generalissimo suggested that if the Cripps mission failed Canada should take the initiative openly and call for an imperial conference. Chiang promised to support such a move and expressed confidence that Roose-

<sup>45</sup> Churchill to King (via Dominions Office), 18 March 1942, telegram no. 63, in *Transfer of Power*, vol. I, pp. 440-41.

<sup>46</sup> Amery to King, 17 March 1942, and to Lord Linlithgow (Viceroy), 19 March 1942, *ibid.*, pp. 436, 444.

<sup>47</sup> Eayrs, *Peacemaking and Deterrence*, p. 234; King Diary, 21 March 1942.

<sup>48</sup> King Papers, Primary Correspondence, vol. 325, Hutchison to King, 19 March 1942, vol. 321, Athlone to King, 22 April 1942.

velt would do so as well.<sup>49</sup> Mackenzie King, however, was not about to assume the risk of going public; he dropped his attempts to affect the Cripps mission and, even when its failure became apparent, ignored the Chinese suggestion.

While the British were doubtless relieved when Mackenzie King's interest in the Cripps mission subsided, they remained concerned to promote the exchange of high commissioners. In response to British pressure, Mackenzie King claimed that he was unable to find a suitable candidate for the post, but Amery was skeptical of this excuse. Early in 1944 he expressed his opinion to the new Viceroy, Lord Wavell, when he questioned the wisdom of placing the recently appointed Australian high commissioner under the purview of the Department of Indians Overseas:

I am sure [Amery wrote] Mackenzie King, who has held up an exchange of High Commissioners mainly for fear of the question of the votes of a handful of Sikhs in British Columbia, would be scared to death if he thought his Canadian High Commissioner in India came under the Department of Indians Overseas and would consequently be at once tackled on that question.<sup>50</sup>

There were good grounds for Amery's conclusion. In April 1942 — within days of King's unfortunate exchange with Churchill — the government of India, through the Dominions Office, formally requested that the denial of the franchise to Indians in British Columbia be reconsidered. The Cabinet War Committee, after discussion which Robertson described as "pretty desultory" and showing "disinclination to take any initiative," agreed to forward the request to the government of British Columbia.<sup>51</sup> In due course the reply came from Victoria that the time was not "opportune" to discuss the matter.<sup>52</sup> The sparseness of this explanation went unchallenged, and Premier Hart and his colleagues were spared further pressure from Ottawa as a result of the wariness

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 335, Soong to King, 24 March 1942.

<sup>50</sup> Amery to Wavell, 16 March 1944, in *Transfer of Power*, vol. IV, ed. Nicholas Mansergh and E. W. R. Lumby (London, 1973), p. 815. The Department of Indians Overseas was responsible for the regulation of emigration to other parts of the empire and for the repatriation of Indians from those territories. Thus it might seem to have an interest in interfering in matters affecting the welfare of Indians in British Columbia. This risk was perhaps reduced in April 1944, when it was renamed the Department of Commonwealth Relations and given the task of managing all aspects of relations with the Dominion.

<sup>51</sup> File 5550-40, summary of Cabinet War Committee Meeting, 4 June 1942, and marginal note by Robertson.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, SSEA to Dominions Secretary, 15 August 1942, despatch no. 69.

which Robertson had noted. Later in 1942, the Vancouver branch of the Khalsa Diwan Society, a Sikh organization claiming to speak for all East Indians in British Columbia, petitioned the governments in Ottawa and Victoria about the franchise. Since this endeavour attracted editorial support from the *Vancouver Province*, which saw “great political advantage” to the wartime Commonwealth in such a gesture,<sup>53</sup> there was perhaps now room for doubt that public opinion was unprepared for change. Neither the federal nor the provincial authorities, however, responded to this hint of a more favourable climate. In External Affairs it was suggested that the government of British Columbia should be made to “feel some responsibility for the international effects of their racial discriminations”<sup>54</sup> but no action followed. King, moreover, was careful to sidetrack a British initiative which might have caused political difficulties in British Columbia. In November 1942 he objected to a proposed speaking tour of North America by an Indian prince, the Jam Saheb of Nawanager, not only because he thought such a titled personage would lack credibility as a representative of India but also because he might revive discussion of the franchise.<sup>55</sup>

While King was successful in preventing a visit from the Jam Saheb, he could not avoid the possibility of public discussion of the Indian question, for in October 1942 it was the subject of a resolution by the national executive committee of the CCF who called on the Canadian government to take a lead in seeking a “democratic settlement.” That settlement, said the executive, should be preceded by the immediate release of the Congress leaders imprisoned as a result of the “Quit India” movement and should be based on acceptance of “the principle of self-government for India NOW as well as after the war.” The Indian and British leaders having, in the eyes of the CCF, lost confidence in each other, negotiations should be conducted by a committee “acting under the auspices of the United Nations, led by Great Britain, China, Russia and the United States.”<sup>56</sup>

Robertson, although he considered the CCF recommendations “somewhat jejune,” thought they might offer the Canadian government the opportunity to make a major statement on India which “might have a

<sup>53</sup> *Vancouver Province*, 13 October 1942.

<sup>54</sup> File 5550-40, Hume Wrong (Assistant Under-Secretary), memorandum for Robertson, 7 January 1943.

<sup>55</sup> King Diary, 23 October 1942.

<sup>56</sup> King Papers, Primary Correspondence, vol. 322, Statement on the Indian Crisis issued by CCF National Office, Ottawa, 27 October 1942.



certain effect on opinion outside of Canada.”<sup>57</sup> Mackenzie King too was keenly interested and consulted Amery, perhaps hoping to test again the prospects for internationalizing the Indian problem. Amery sent what King considered a “splendid reply” but rejected the idea of an international commission.<sup>58</sup> As a result, the matter was allowed to drop with no statement issued. Perhaps the Prime Minister, still nervous about opinion in British Columbia, was not too sorry to defer action: writing in his diary at the time his message was despatched to Amery, he had observed that the material prepared in External Affairs would “come in useful later on.”<sup>59</sup>

King, then, seems to have reconciled himself, for domestic political reasons, to restricted involvement in plans for the future of India. He did not overlook opportunities, however, to continue to express his interest when he could do so without risking controversy at home. Early in December 1942 he discussed the Indian question with Roosevelt and afterwards urged the British to deal with it in a proposed statement on colonial policy.<sup>60</sup> About the same time he supported the efforts of Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar (at the time a member of the War Cabinet and of the Pacific War Council in London) to secure greater Indianization of the Viceroy’s Executive Council.<sup>61</sup> In late 1943 the Bengal famine offered the occasion for more concrete evidence of Canada’s interest in India’s well-being. On King’s initiative, the government offered a gift of wheat, both to relieve the suffering and to promote better “intra-imperial relations.”<sup>62</sup> Although Churchill’s objection to diverting shipping prevented Canada from sending more than a token amount, Amery and Wavell were pleased with the gesture which, they thought, had a good psychological effect in India.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Memoranda and Notes, vol. 281, Robertson, memorandum for Prime Minister, 31 October 1942.

<sup>58</sup> King Diary, 4 and 13 November 1942; King Papers, Primary Correspondence, vol. 330, High Commissioner in Great Britain to SSEA, 11 November 1942, telegram no. 2798.

<sup>59</sup> King Diary, 4 November 1942.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 December 1942; King Papers, Primary Correspondence, vol. 330, SSEA to High Commissioner in Great Britain, 24 December 1942, telegram no. 2395.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 333, SSEA to Dominions Secretary, 27 December 1942, telegram no. 276.

<sup>62</sup> File 4929-J-40, SSEA to Dominions Secretary, 13 November 1943, telegram no. 182.

<sup>63</sup> Wavell to Amery, 23 November 1943, in *Transfer of Power*, vol. IV, p. 489. The episode is summarized in file 4929-J-40, Wrong to Pearson, 21 December 1943.

Despite these gestures, Canada's credibility as an advocate of liberalization in India was, as Robertson recognized, diminished by failure to deal with the franchise.<sup>64</sup> Throughout 1943, however, there was no change in either Victoria or Ottawa, even though the governments in both capitals were under pressure from the usual advocates of reform, including the Khalsa Diwan Society, Polak and the CCF. By 1944 there was even less likelihood that Mackenzie King, increasingly preoccupied by the prospect of a federal election,<sup>65</sup> would risk rocking the boat in British Columbia. That there was danger in doing so became apparent in March when, on the initiative of the CCF, the provincial legislature discussed granting the franchise to Indians and others of Asiatic origin. What lent the debate particular significance were overtones of racial prejudice and the revelation of division within the cabinet. The offending remarks were delivered by G. S. Pearson, Provincial Secretary and Minister of Labour:

There should be [he said] more than nationality in order to allow persons to enjoy the franchise. The Hindu is not helping us to maintain the standard of living we have set up in the province. There is no body in the province as unreliable, dishonest and deceitful as the Hindus. We cannot get information from them. They break every regulation we have. . . . we are justified in excluding them [Asians] from the full rights of citizenship.<sup>66</sup>

Not surprisingly, Pearson's remarks led to spirited debate inside and outside the legislature, including denunciation by the Khalsa Diwan Society and criticism within the chamber by his cabinet colleague, the Minister of Education, H. G. T. Perry.<sup>67</sup>

While no change in British Columbia's legislation resulted, the controversy was a reminder of the continuing importance of the issue in the province's politics and the dangers to outsiders of becoming involved. It was drawn to Mackenzie King's attention<sup>68</sup> and it is unlikely that the

<sup>64</sup> File 5550-40, Robertson to H. R. L. Henry (private secretary to Prime Minister), 15 June 1943.

<sup>65</sup> Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, vol. I, pp. 663-66.

<sup>66</sup> *Victoria Colonist*, 9 March 1944. In response to the Khalsa Diwan Society's objections, Pearson said that his statement referred to his experience as Minister of Labour and was not intended to have broader application. The Society refused to accept this explanation. See *Vancouver Province*, 22 March 1944, and *Victoria Colonist*, 23 March 1944.

<sup>67</sup> *Victoria Times*, 10 and 16 March 1944; *Victoria Colonist*, 15 and 23 March 1944; *Vancouver Province*, 22 March and 6 April 1944. Perry had opposed discrimination against the Japanese before the War. See Roy, "Educating the 'East,'" p. 65.

<sup>68</sup> File 5550-40, H. S. Ferns (Special Assistant, External Affairs) memorandum for Prime Minister, 4 April 1944. Ferns' intention was the reverse of what happened,

lesson was lost on him as he prepared to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting in London in the spring of 1944. At any rate, he declined to follow the suggestion of M. J. Coldwell, the national leader of the CCF, that he initiate discussion of India at the conference, although he did undertake to take it up privately with Amery.<sup>69</sup> In London, King had even less to say on the matter than Coldwell might have expected. He told Lord Cranborne, the Dominions Secretary, that he would take no exception to whatever the British wished, and that he "wanted to be as helpful as possible"; general elections, however, were ahead, and he could not "do anything which would look like making a commitment in advance of any decision by the Canadian Parliament on anything that might be vital."<sup>70</sup> Although Cranborne responded sympathetically, King never raised the question with Amery: they discussed India only once, when King offered his familiar explanation that he had been unable to find a suitable candidate for high commissioner. Amery, who wanted to deal with the franchise, found King so "elusive" that he was unable to do so, and later gave vent to his frustration: "I frankly doubt [he told Wavell] if I should have got anything out of him. He did nothing at the Conference, or ever will do anything at any time on any subject, which might risk losing a single vote!"<sup>71</sup>

The Commonwealth conference of 1944 was the last episode of potential significance in Canadian relations with India until after the war. One reason was Amery's discouragement over the franchise; later in 1944 he accepted without question Malcolm MacDonald's view that political difficulties in Canada made progress impossible.<sup>72</sup> In addition, British interest in the exchange of high commissioners waned, for Wavell, because of difficulty in finding suitable nominees for overseas posts, came to the conclusion that such representation was unlikely to enhance his government's popularity.<sup>73</sup> King, meanwhile, gave up his attempts to affect the course of events in India, no doubt influenced — as Amery had surmised

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for he wanted the Prime Minister to have a "confidential discussion" with Hart in an effort to secure an end to discrimination against at least the Indians and Chinese in British Columbia.

<sup>69</sup> PAC, External Affairs file 140-39, King to Coldwell, 15 April 1944.

<sup>70</sup> King Diary, 28 April 1944.

<sup>71</sup> Amery to Wavell, 2 June 1944, in *Transfer of Power*, vol. IV, p. 998; also p. 947.

<sup>72</sup> Amery to Wavell, 9 November 1944, *ibid.*, vol. V, ed. Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon (London, 1974), pp. 191-92.

<sup>73</sup> Wavell to Amery, 29 April 1944, *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 846; Amery to Wavell, 7 May 1944, *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 947; Wavell to Amery, 16 May 1944, *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 971.

— by the desire to avoid trouble in British Columbia as he approached the election of 1945. Certainly the dangers were evident by the time King launched his campaign, in Vancouver, in May of that year. For the legislature had once again discussed the franchise and the outcome had revealed a widening split in the coalition, with Perry and two other members on the government side, J. H. Gillis and Nancy Hodges, voting for an opposition motion to grant the vote.<sup>74</sup> The result still did not favour the Indians but they did receive one small concession, the enfranchisement of members of the community who had fought in the Canadian armed forces.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps this change was an indication that the provincial government was growing more sensitive to criticism of racial discrimination. That criticism, from both domestic and external sources, produced mounting pressure in Ottawa and Victoria after the war until, in April 1947, the provincial legislature finally voted to extend the franchise to persons of East Indian, Chinese and native Indian origin.<sup>76</sup> About the same time, Canada and India designated their first high commissioners. One of the first beneficiaries of the cordial relations thus established was Mackenzie King himself, who was able, despite illness, to play a role of some importance at the Commonwealth conference of 1948 in paving the way for continued Indian membership.<sup>77</sup>

The Canadian government had good reason for its wartime interest in India, because of the Commonwealth connection, concern for the common war effort, and the impact of external events on domestic politics and so on Canada's effectiveness as a combatant. In proposing to organize international involvement in the Indian problem, Mackenzie King reckoned without the implacability of Churchill's opposition, which even Roosevelt found daunting.<sup>78</sup> But even in playing a more modest role, King was hampered by his anxieties about politics in Canada and his failure to come to grips with his own Achilles heel, the British Columbia franchise. As a result, Canada had little if any influence on the Indian situation, at the very time that the war seemed to create an opportunity

<sup>74</sup> Vancouver *Province*, 28 March 1945. Perry had not voted against the government in 1944, despite the views which he expressed in the legislature.

<sup>75</sup> Lee, "Road to Enfranchisement," pp. 57-58. Chinese, Japanese and native Indians also benefited from this measure.

<sup>76</sup> On external pressure, see High Tinker, *Separate and Unequal: India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth, 1920-1950* (Vancouver, 1976), p. 304. Lee, "Road to Enfranchisement," is also relevant.

<sup>77</sup> On the conference, see Eayrs, *Peacemaking and Deterrence*, pp. 238-39.

<sup>78</sup> File 5901-40, Keenleyside, memorandum for Under-Secretary, 15 November 1943.

and a need for involvement. Yet the effort did focus attention on injustices within Canada which, had they been allowed to continue, would have bedevilled relations with independent India. That attention encouraged the rapid removal of the franchise problem once the tensions of war were past, no small gain for subsequent relations between Canada and India.