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House of Commons Debates

FOURTH SESSION—TENTH PARLIAMENT

ORIENTAL IMMIGRATION

SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

RALPH SMITH, M.P.

FOR NANAIMO

IN

HOUSE OF COMMONS, DECEMBER 16, 1907

Mr. RALPH SMITH (Nanaimo) moved :
That in the opinion of this House steps should be taken to restrict the influx of oriental immigrants into Canada; and inasmuch as the policy of the government concerning Chinese immigration has proved entirely satisfactory, a definite policy should be immediately put into operation looking to the accomplishment of equally satisfactory results with regard to all other oriental immigrants.

He said : In moving the resolution which stands in my name, calling upon the government to restrict the incoming of oriental labour into British Columbia with regard to the Japanese to the same extent as they have done with regard to the Chinese, I am fully aware how the discussions on this question have been associated in the minds of certain members of the House who have not had the western experience of this question, with the principle of provincialism and race prejudice.

In 1902, when I addressed this House on this question previous to the imposition of the head tax on Chinese, one good old Presbyterian, a conscientious old gentleman, in this House, rose and said that in his opinion the policy I had advocated was contrary altogether to the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Sir, it was easy to associate a discussion of this question with provincialism. I have heard it stated repeatedly that the oriental question was a provincial question. It is true that the agi-

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tation on this subject is confined to British Columbia, because the effects are more directly felt in British Columbia. I do not think it is possible for the members of this House to have a correct conception of the importance of this question until they have had a personal experience of it in the west. I have known leading members of this House, on both sides of it, who, some years ago, expressed strong views against the anti-oriental agitation, but after they paid a visit to British Columbia and came in contact with the actual circumstances and conditions, when they met the facts face to face, they came back to this House willing to favour restrictions being placed upon that class of immigrants. This is not a provincial question. Mr. Speaker, I desire to say, as a representative from British Columbia, that we, the representatives of that province, are supposed to be informed of the actual circumstances surrounding this question. I desire to say to this House that I do not support the principle of restriction on this kind of immigration because I think it would be beneficial only to British Columbia; I want to take the broader stand that what is bad for British Columbia is so because its ultimate results would be bad for Canada as a whole. I want to take the position in this House that what is good for British Columbia can only be so considered when it can be conclusively

Speech by MP Ralph Smith in House of Commons on Oriental Immigration, 1907

Smith, Ralph. "Oriental Immigration." *House of Commons Debates*. Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. 10th Parl., 4th sess. 1907. (BC Archives, NWp_325_S657, Pages 1, 3, 4, 8, 11)

at in the light of our empire. What is bad for Canada cannot be very good for the empire. If the settlement of this question is good for British Columbia it is good for Canada, and what is good for Canada is good for the empire. We cannot disassociate these several interests. The strength of the empire depends absolutely upon the quality and condition of the units that constitute that empire, and any weakness or any supposed injustice felt by any people in any section or portion of the empire is something that creates a weakness in the link connecting together the various parts of that empire. It is a serious question because there is an attempt on the part of the imperial authorities to suddenly work out the assimilation of alien races. The disposition of the British government is to make settlements in the interest of peace, of trade and of more close and friendly relations with alien powers. It is in the line of the advancement of civilization. It is the duty and the business of this government—and we believe it is a part of the great prerogative of the British empire—to seek to influence and to bring about conditions of peace and friendly relations with every alien country in the world in the interest of her own commerce and people. But, it does strike me that with the disposition of the British government in creating treaties with oriental countries like Japan there has been a tendency to seek to bring about an association of alien races on a plan that is more sudden than it is possible to work it out. There is existing in the minds of people generally, the idea that the Asiatic race cannot be brought to suddenly assimilate with the occidental race. I know that it is generally supposed that the prejudice is all on the side of the occidental. It is common to hear the statement in Canada that Canadians are prejudiced against the orientals. I could occupy the time of this House by giving instances from literary men who have lived in those countries, who have written works connected with the history of those countries, who have had an experience of those countries to show the bitterness of the jealousy existing in the mind of the oriental against the occidental. It is not the occidental against the oriental, but it is vice versa. To say the least, it is as much on one side as it is on the other. Centuries have developed insurmountable divergencies between the oriental and occidental races and it may take centuries to obliterate the divergencies which have been created. I am hopeful that it can be done. Still, there are some people who do not believe that it can. I am absolutely certain that it is not within immediate reach, and I am also certain that a process of slow and intellectual moral development and a change of system must take place to bring about the eradication of the prejudice that exists between these two races. It is a

serious problem also because it may mean a tremendous oriental invasion. Let me draw a picture for this House; let me look at two aspects of the question. Some philosopher in British Columbia, not confined to the man on the street, has prophesied that it may mean a military invasion by the Japanese on the Pacific coast. That has never bothered me for one minute. It is stated in British Columbia that Japanese spies have been making observations of the British portion of the Pacific coast, laying out their plan of operations and finding out, with minuteness and completeness, the whole situation. This has been interpreted as evidence of a spirit and a disposition on the part of the Japanese authorities to look to a military invasion of Canada. Well, Sir, so far as I am concerned, that is too remote, too far off, to enter into the domain of practical politics. I have neither the time nor the mind to deal with a theory of that kind, and personally I do not believe there is any such contemplation in the minds of even the Japanese themselves.

But, I want to remind this House that whilst there may not be a military invasion contemplated, a labour invasion is easily within practical accomplishment. Let me mention two things—in the orient are eight hundred millions of starving, competing people, without the spirit (except within these few later years) without the spirit of enterprise connected with the full development of their own country. It is not sufficiently enterprising to provide labour and to afford a livelihood for its own people. That is a picture of the orientals at home. On the other hand Asia is easily accessible to the Pacific coast of Canada; it is within a few days reach of what? It is within a few days reach of a land in their imagination to be flowing with milk and honey, a rich country sparsely settled, a country of tremendously large areas beginning to be populated, a country where men are becoming rich by labour, in comparison with conditions of remuneration in Japan and China, and these depressed, and impoverished, and starving millions have heard of this prosperous land. Can we wonder that they come to this country, and can we not see that if unrestrained; if the barriers are thrown down, or if the present restrictions are not raised, that within sight there is an easy possibility of an overwhelming labour invasion from the orient into the Pacific province of Canada? Now, Sir, I contend, as I contended in reference to the Chinese question, that an argument on a question of national importance is not good if when driven to its logical conclusion it is defective in any degree. If it is good that we should have 25,000 orientals in British Columbia for the purpose of developing industrial enterprise, why should it not be good if that principle were absolutely unrestrained and unlimited, and that these eight hundred

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millions of starving labourers be given an opportunity to come to all of Canada to develop her resources? If it is a good thing that the industries of British Columbia should have the benefit of the immigration of the Asiatics into that province, why is it not good for the Northwest, why is it not good for Ontario? Why should the mill operator in Ontario, or Quebec, or Nova Scotia or any other province, be deprived of the supposed benefit of the oriental labour if it is good for the mill operator in British Columbia? If it is good for British Columbia to have this partial invasion of Asiatics, then drive the argument to its logical conclusion and say it would be good for all Canada. If that argument holds, then, where you have a labour market of 800,000,000 why should we not bring in orientals to develop and make Canada a prosperous and enormously rich country; why should we not go to the logical extreme and say: let the orientals spread over all Canada; they will open up the country, they will develop enterprise, they will enrich the country; let us bring them in?

Therefore I say, Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, under existing conditions it is absolutely necessary at this present minute that we should consider effective and permanent methods of restricting the invasion of oriental immigrants, and especially of Japanese immigrants into British Columbia. Now, I anticipate difficulties with regard to this phase of the question no matter what policy we may pursue. If this immigration is absolutely restricted it is quite possible that European and American capital will organize and enter the countries of the orient to develop them, and to promote commerce within them. Japan is in a position of great advantage in that she is able to supply every want of her own markets. The probability therefore is that European and American capital will seek a field in that country, and will develop its great resources so that in the next decade we may expect a mighty competition in the commercial markets of the world, and a reversal of the existing commercial relations between the west and the east. British capital invested in that country, with its tremendous resources and with an inexhaustible supply of the cheapest kind of labour, is going to present to Canada in future years a tremendous commercial competition, and that in my mind will be the aspect in which the question will have to be considered in years to come. Old ideas of Asia have to be modified to-day; we cannot regard her in the same light as we have been accustomed to in the past. Asia has awakened, and she is in competition with the United States and with Canada in every respect. We are forced to realize that fact. Now, whenever the commercial interests of Canada are in jeopardy we

have no hesitation at all in deciding to protect these interests. We are always in this House ready to raise a barrier of restriction with the view of placing the commercial interests of Canada in a position of equality with those of any other country. One side of this House may not be quite as ready to give that protection to exactly the same extent as the other side, but the principle of commercial protection to Canada as against the cheap productions of other countries appears to be the well settled policy of this parliament. And why should not that principle apply to the immigration of cheap labour just as it does to the importation of cheap goods?

There are two things which it is very difficult for us to understand, and especially is it difficult for people who live in the east to understand them. One is, that the Asiatic can always under-live and under-sell the white man. We have to make that confession when we come to consider this question. The old argument we used against the Chinaman does not apply here. We used, fifteen years ago, to say in British Columbia that one white man was worth two Chinamen. Well I never said so; I always said that if one white man was equal to two Chinamen there would not be any competition in labour, and therefore there would not be any Chinese question. However, that may be, it is generally recognized that to-day, we have to change the formula, and we have to be prepared to admit that industrially and economically the Japanese comes in and makes it impossible—either in the commercial or industrial world of Canada—makes it impossible for a citizen of this country to compete with him. Some people may consider that a very serious admission, but whatever they may think it is an admission that must be made. Our old conception of the inferiority of the Asiatic race in industry and commerce has to be revised. To-day we do not want the Japanese in, not because he is inferior industrially, but for very different reasons; because industrially and commercially he is evidently in some trades our superior. Let me remind the House of this—when the agitation on the Chinese question was strong in British Columbia you could not get the commercial interests of British Columbia to support that agitation with the same earnestness as the industrial classes did. Why? Because the Chinese was simply a labourer; he did not enter into competition with the commercial interests; the commercial interests of the country on the whole got a benefit out of him, and in some sense and to some degree the commercial interests employed him. That aspect of the question has completely changed. To-day, the commercial men of British Columbia fear the Japanese as the industrial classes ten years ago feared the Chinaman. The Chinese coolie entered into the industrial competition with the man

gration, it is a tremendous stretch of the imagination to think that as a commercial agent he would go to Japan and send the Japanese to British Columbia. I wish to remind my hon. friend (Mr. R. L. Borden) that the Conservative press took that statement up after he left the province and I mention it here because we have had to meet that assertion. What have the British Columbian press to say upon this question, that this discredited official was taken hold of by the Department of Trade and Commerce and transferred to Japan, that the government had secretly endorsed a treaty and just after the treaty was settled this discredited agent, at the expense of the people of Canada, was sent to Japan and was the direct cause of the importation of Japanese. I made some inquiries about Mr. Preston's appointment, but if Mr. Preston cannot be believed on oath, then I suppose hon. gentlemen will say that those who would promote his interest could not be believed on oath, so perhaps it will be of no use to read the orders in council by which he was appointed commercial agent to Japan. I find that Mr. Preston was not in Japan until six months after the contracts were made in British Columbia under which the Japanese were brought into this country. I think it is fair to say that much in Mr. Preston's defence. I am not criticising the statement of the hon. the leader of the opposition (Mr. R. L. Borden) for the sake of doing it, and I would not have referred to this except that it has been brought up in the Conservative press as a good argument and it shows that it must have been difficult for my hon. friend to find a reason.

I wish now to come to the real reason of the importation of a large number of orientals within such a short period. We have some information. The government sent Mr. Mackenzie King as a commissioner to British Columbia to look into this question, and I have before me two of the contracts that were made, part of the evidence given before the commissioner, that account absolutely for the immigration of the Japanese into British Columbia at this period. These contracts were made with the Wellington Coal Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. As regards the Grand Trunk Pacific, I cannot speak so positively. I have looked over the evidence to see if the Grand Trunk Pacific had made contracts to bring them in, but I did not find it. I looked over the evidence carefully, and according to that evidence I found that two contracts were made, one by the Wellington Coal Company and the other by the Canadian Pacific Railway, and these explain fully the large influx of orientals into British Columbia this year. I desire to call the nature of these contracts to the attention of the government. I do not think it ought to be possible for contracts to be made to bring orientals

into this country, or to bring in skilled labour of any kind, unless these contracts are authorized and supervised by responsible officers of the government. I hope the government will give some consideration to that opinion. These contracts do not constitute a voluntary agreement between free and independent men, but between an irresponsible company and corporate wealth in Canada. I do not think that any financial company ought to be authorized to bring in servile labour to Canada. Who compose the Wellington Coal Company? The Wellington Coal Company is presided over by Mr. Dunsmuir, the present Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. I am not associating that position with the company, I am simply stating that the Dunsmuirs were the principal owners of this enterprise. Now the Wellington Coal Company has been enormously subsidized company for the purpose of building a railway from Victoria to Nanaimo on Vancouver Island. It has received a cash subsidy of \$750,000, and 1,900,000 acres of land, free for ever from taxation. The Wellington Coal Company entered into negotiations with certain Japanese who were at the head of an organization called the Canadian Nippon Supply Company, to bring in 500 Japanese labourers to work in the coal mines.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that while there is an intense feeling in British Columbia against the coming in of Japanese, there is a special objection to the employment of Japanese in coal mines. Every piece of restrictive legislation in the provincial legislature has been particularly directed against the employment of orientals in coal mines. No man who knows anything about coal mining can be ignorant of the cause of this legislation. Twenty years ago there were many serious disasters in the coal mines on Vancouver Island, which were traceable to the employment of orientals. The Wellington Coal Company and the Nanaimo Coal Company came together twenty years ago and made an agreement that they would never again employ orientals in their mines. But here is a contract made to bring in 500 orientals, for five years, to pay their wages over to this Canadian Nippon Supply Company, who will in turn pay them over to the labourers. Here are conditions in this contract making the company responsible for consequences if the white men strike against any unfavourable conditions the contractors must be responsible for keeping the Japanese at work, thereby bringing Japanese labour directly into competition with white labour. Then the Canadian Pacific Railway Company made the same contract for the same period, to bring in 2,000 Japanese. I want to say that I am entirely opposed to the possibility of such contracts being made in this country, under any circumstances, or unless, as I have already said, they are entirely supervised by

Honolulu is crowded with Japanese, and as the United States has declared that these Japanese even when they have passports to Honolulu cannot enter the continental United States, they are brought across the sea in thousands to Canada. They cannot be taken to the United States, they must be taken to Canada. And, Sir, if no provision is made against that system of contract; if there is no supervision by this government, then we will have open contracts bringing these Japanese from the Insular Possessions of the United States and dumping them in Canada, while all the time the United States is in possession of its treaty with Japan which helps the Americans to do more business in Japan than is done by any other country in the world. If the industrial and commercial interests of Canada are to be protected from the effect of this special legislation of the United States, it seems to me it is necessary that the Canadian government should take this amendment very seriously into consideration, and just as soon as possible.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have taken up the time of the House to perhaps a greater extent than I expected, but I want to ask indulgence for a few more minutes so that I may refer to other aspects of this question. There never was a time when European and British labour was coming into British Columbia in anything like the same proportion as during the last one or two years. The advertisements about this rich and undeveloped country have recently attracted hundreds of British miners to the coal mines of Vancouver Island. These are men of the class we want; men who come with their wives and families to British Columbia to take up their homes there. And, Sir, I say to this House that the great misfortune is that just when these enterprising citizens were coming to the Pacific coast and getting themselves comfortably settled among us they had to face the competition of the contract labour brought over from Asia. How is it that we have experienced so much difficulty in inducing European people to come in British Columbia? The record of British Columbia with respect to oriental immigration is the answer to that question. I was in England some years

ago, and when I asked English miners: why do you not come to British Columbia where you will find better opportunities, better conditions, and better prospects, the answer was: Why, that is an oriental country. During the last five or six years, on account of the successful operation of the law enacted by this parliament in 1903, that impression of British Columbia was gradually being obliterated, so that during the last twelve months or so British labour was being encouraged to come there to a greater extent than ever before. But just as this British labour had begun to endeavour to change its fortunes and to seek a home in a British province on the Pacific coast, it finds itself face to face with an influx of ten thousand or eleven thousand Asiatics in sixteen months. The impression will surely go forth that if these contracting companies are allowed the right and the privilege to contract for oriental labour, then there can be no room and no opportunity for European labour in this British country. That is the case I put before the government and before this parliament. I say that the attitude of the government from 1903 to 1906 was successful in preventing the invasion of British Columbia by orientals. I take the responsibility of that opinion as a member of this House; I say it here, I say it everywhere. But I do say, that when looking over the remedies for the present grievances, and remembering the restrictive legislation that has been provided by the United States in spite of the international treaty they have with Japan; it is the duty of this Canadian government to take action immediately—and by that I mean as soon as possible. I do not know what is the result of the negotiations of the Minister of Labour in Japan; I have no opportunity of knowing. I cannot prophesy what we may expect to be the result of these negotiations. What I do expect is that we can continue the successful operation of the commercial understanding which we have with Japan to the commercial advantage of Canada, and yet make such a diplomatic arrangement with that country as shall afford a positive restriction upon the influx of Japanese into Canada which will settle the question for all time.