

Archive Package: Loss of the Franchise

Quote Sheet: Loss of the Franchise

Gordon Cumyow

Born in Vancouver in the early 1900s.

Gordon's father, Won Cumyow, was reputed to be the first Chinese person born in Canada.

“ When I tried to study law, the law society figured that all they had to do was get together and just pass a resolution. It was very simple—if you haven't got a right to vote, you can't study law. Simple as that. And the pharmaceutical association, same way. But once the Chinese got the vote, that was nothing. I studied law for three years. When they couldn't article me, I quit. My lawyer told me, “Well, fight 'em. Get a writ of mandamus. Force 'em.” I said, “What am I spending good money for, fighting the powers that be?” I switched to banking and I worked as a bank clerk for five or six or seven years.

Fred Soon

Born in Canton, China, in 1908.

Immigrated to Vancouver with uncle and cousins in 1921.

“ In those days, you were called a “landed immigrant,” but there was no such thing as a full citizen, because you were not allowed to vote. You didn't have the franchise and you were not naturalized. We weren't naturalized until 1947, after the Second World War. Before then, you were treated just like a political football, like an object and it didn't matter how badly you were treated. There was no way to vent your sorrow and be able to do anything about it, because what the political parties were doing was for the privilege of their own citizens.

The CCF was one of the groups that protested, but not just one group or one party, a lot of people protested—conscientious people protested.

“ I didn't have the opportunity of higher education. My father was a worker, he didn't have too much money. I wanted to finish high school and he said, “Forget it, you won't get very much ahead.” Then I wanted to go to a technical school, I wanted to be a mechanic or an engineer and start out in the technological field. I tried to do that, and before the season was half over my father took me out of that school. “Are you crazy? You'll never get a job, you'll never get anything like that. Even in a garage they won't hire you.” I took a commercial course, because he said when you take a commercial course, you don't have to rely on people to hire you, you can own a business, you can hold on to your job.

Dr. So Won Leung

Born in Canton, China in 1916.
Immigrated to Canada in 1922.

“ It was good for the politicians to use the Orientals as an issue. If you look at the newspapers of those years, you'll find all these inflammatory speeches by the politicians. They're the ones, actually, who caused most of the trouble—the pamphlets being written by them and the speeches they made, and so on. That didn't happen in any other province. None of the other provinces had discriminatory laws as they had in British Columbia, and mainly because the Chinese and the Japanese could be seen here.

We, amongst many other people in groups, acted to get the franchise. I was president of the Army and Navy Veterans for a couple of years. We made briefs to Ottawa, we helped to arouse the interest of the people in the elections that were held and took a very active part in the elections so that the people could become more involved.

Excerpts from:
ed. Itter, Carole and Marlatt, Daphne. *Opening Doors: in Vancouver's East End Strathcona*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2011. Print. Pages 34-5, 146, 147, 205.