

The Evolution, Role, and Impact of Japanese Canadian Newspapers: Before, During, and after the Second World War

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Introduction

The history of the Japanese Canadian press is a profound reflection of the community's broader struggle for identity, civil rights, and survival in the face of systemic racism and state-sponsored oppression. From the bustling, ideologically fractured streets of Vancouver's Japantown in the 1930s to the isolated internment camps of the Second World War, and finally to the post-war diaspora across Canada, Japanese-language and bilingual newspapers served as vital lifelines. These publications evolved from fiercely competitive ideological battlegrounds into co-opted instruments of state survival and, ultimately, into essential community service agencies. By examining the trajectories of major publications—most notably *The New Canadian* under the leadership of Tom Shoyama—we can trace the profound demographic, political, and cultural shifts within the Japanese Canadian community throughout the twentieth century.

Chapter 1 The Pre-War Era (1930s) – A Community in Transition

The Socio-Economic and Political Landscape

During the 1930s, the Japanese Canadian community in British Columbia navigated a highly turbulent period defined by severe economic hardship, institutionalized racism, and a massive demographic transition. Japanese Canadians were legally treated as second-class citizens; they were completely deprived of the right to vote and were systematically barred from employment in the civil service, professional occupations, and public works projects. Furthermore, discriminatory federal policies actively reduced the number of their fishing licenses, effectively shutting many out of their traditional economic mainstay. The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 exacerbated these issues, causing a sharp rise in unemployment and forcing many into the timber industry, where they endured appalling working conditions, spurring the creation of labour movements such as the Camp Mill Labour Union.

Simultaneously, the community was undergoing a massive generational shift from the "First-Generation Era" (*Issei*) to the "Second-Generation Era" (*Nisei*). By 1931, the *Nisei* constituted approximately half of the population, and by 1941, sixty percent were natural-born Canadian citizens. Educated in Canadian public schools with English as their first language, these *Nisei* sought to enter the professional labour market but were blocked by a thick wall of institutionalized discrimination; even highly qualified university graduates found it virtually impossible to secure employment. Meanwhile, the older *Issei*, exhausted by decades of exclusion and hindered in their social advancement, increasingly turned toward Japan. As Japan expanded its military campaigns in Asia and embraced ultranationalism, international hostility intensified, leading many marginalized *Issei* to adopt unnaturally virulent pro-Japan ideologies to find a sense of belonging.

The Ideological Battlefield of the Japanese-Language Press

Against this fraught backdrop, the Japanese-language press wielded immense influence in shaping public opinion. The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a "tripartite rivalry" among three major daily newspapers, characterized by fierce ideological conflicts over assimilation and nationalism. These newspapers operated under immense financial strain during the Depression, yet continued to deliver free copies to impoverished readers. Circulation figures immediately before the war were staggering, with over 8,000 copies published daily for a population of just 7,700 native Japanese speakers, suggesting that many households subscribed to multiple competing papers.

The ideological debates centred on "assimilationist" versus "anti-assimilationist" (pro-return-to-Japan) stances and on "cultural assimilation" versus "structural assimilation". The earliest pioneer of the daily press, the *Kanada Shinpo* (founded 1903), strongly advocated for "cultural assimilation," arguing that Japanese Canadians should learn English, adopt white customs, and convert to Christianity. However, this alienated the majority Buddhist population, leading to fierce competition and the paper's eventual demise in 1921.

In its wake, the major players of the 1930s emerged:

- ***Tairiku Nippo* (The Continental Daily News):** Founded in 1907, this was the oldest, largest, and most financially stable newspaper, operating from its own building with a circulation of 4,000. It maintained a strong Buddhist character and a conservative readership. By the 1930s, it adopted an extremely prominent pro-return-to-Japan mentality, extolling Japanese nationalism to the point where it was difficult to distinguish it from a publication based in imperial Japan.
- ***Kanada Hibi Shimbun*:** Established in 1923 by Shigezo Suzuki, a former correspondent for Japan's Dōmei News Agency, this morning and evening daily had a circulation of 2,500. It was at the absolute forefront of the anti-assimilationist stance, leaning even further to the right than the *Tairiku Nippo*, and fervently defending the interests of the *Issei* through the lens of Japanese ultranationalism.
- ***Nikkan Minshu* (The Daily People):** Launched in 1924 under the guidance of chief editor Etsu Suzuki, this paper served the working class with a circulation of 1,500. Evolving from a labour union organ, it adopted a "structural assimilationist" stance, advocating for equal participation in Canadian society through trade unionism and civil rights. However, its socialist leanings caused conservative community members to view it suspiciously as a "red flag-waver".

The Birth of The New Canadian

In November 1938, a radically different publication entered the fray: *The New Canadian*. As the first newspaper aimed entirely at the second-generation *Nisei*, it was published exclusively in English and carried the subtitle "The Voice of the Nisei". Founded by Shinobu Peter Higashi, a University of British Columbia graduate, the paper ignored Japanese international news, focusing entirely on Canadian society, *Nisei* social advancement, and the acquisition of true citizenship rights. When Higashi left for East Asia in April 1939, Thomas Kunito (Tom) Shoyama, a brilliant economics and commerce graduate blocked from a career in chartered accountancy by racism, assumed the role of Editor-in-Chief. Under

Shoyama, the paper boldly refuted discrimination from the standpoint of loyal Canadian citizens, though its pre-war circulation remained a financially precarious 300-400 copies.

Chapter 2 The Second World War – Censorship, Resistance, and The New Canadian

The Outbreak of War and the Silencing of the Press

The attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, fundamentally shattered the Japanese Canadian community. Canada immediately declared war on Japan, and the federal government invoked the *War Measures Act*. Within hours, the three major Japanese-language dailies—*Tairiku Nippo*, *Kanada Hibi Shimbun*, and *Nikkan Minshu*—were suspended, plunging the community into an informational blackout. Strict language controls were enacted: 51 Japanese-language schools were closed, shortwave radios were confiscated, and long-distance telephone calls were banned. For the non-English-speaking *Issei* women, the sudden loss of their newspapers caused profound terror, forcing them to attempt to translate English dailies with dictionaries. At the same time, their husbands' fishing fleets were seized, and families were separated into livestock pens at Hastings Park.

To manage the forced removal of over 21,000 Japanese Canadians, the federal government established the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) in March 1942. Realizing they had no mechanism to broadcast relocation orders to the monolingual *Issei*, the BCSC co-opted *The New Canadian*. As the only newspaper permitted to survive, it was bought out by the government, which distributed its entire print run from April to June 1942 free of charge. To reach the *Issei*, the paper was forced to become bilingual. Takaichi Umezaki, the former editor of the labour daily *Minshu*, was hired as the Japanese-language editor to translate BCSC directives, transforming the publication from an English *Nisei* salon paper into an official state notice board.

Wartime Operations: Logistics and Limitations

Relocated to the interior internment camp of Kaslo, British Columbia, the newspaper operated under crippling physical and financial constraints. The layout changed drastically to accommodate the BCSC directives and the new Japanese-language section. Because severe travel bans prevented staff from conducting field reporting, the paper relied entirely on two sources for news: clippings from mainstream Canadian and Japanese American newspapers, and extensive letters to the editor. These letters became a vital lifeline; internees with ample idle time wrote detailed accounts of their harsh living conditions across the various camps and beet farms. Despite heavy censorship, these letters formed the core of the publication, with half of the paper effectively being "created by its readers".

Editorial Phase 1 (1941–1942): Cooperation and Calm

During the initial uprooting, editor Tom Shoyama adopted a strategic editorial philosophy of "law-abiding cooperation" and calm. Shoyama tactically believed that by demonstrating unswerving loyalty and perfect compliance with the BCSC relocation orders, the *Nisei* would irrefutably prove their worth as Canadian citizens and secure their post-war constitutional rights. *The New Canadian* actively printed government directives that encouraged the purchase of war bonds and repeated the editorial mantra to "Have Faith in Canada".

This conciliatory stance, however, triggered a profound and bitter generational fracture. To the *Issei*, who were legally barred from citizenship and were currently losing the farms, homes, and businesses they had spent decades building, Shoyama's compliance was viewed as "naive, dangerously idealistic nonsense". The *Issei* felt deeply betrayed, believing the young *Nisei* editors were sacrificing their parents' lifelong economic security for an abstract political theory. Consequently, many *Issei* and ideological resisters branded the newspaper's staff as "Inu" (dogs or state informers) and dismissed the publication as a sterile "government mouthpiece".

This animosity fueled the rise of the Mass Evacuation Group (MEG), a coalition of *Issei* and older *Nisei* who actively rejected *The New Canadian's* advice. The BCSC's original plan was to permanently fragment the community by separating non-disabled men into forced-labour road camps while leaving women and children in Hastings Park. The MEG launched a massive campaign of direct resistance; hundreds of men staged strikes in road camps near Jasper, Princeton, and Schreiber, or refused to board the trains in Vancouver, demanding family reunification. This boots-on-the-ground defiance completely paralyzed the government's logistics, forcing the state to abandon its forced-labour separation strategy and rapidly construct the unified "ghost town" family internment camps in the Kootenays (such as Tashme, New Denver, and Slocan) in June 1942. In this crucial period of evacuation, *The New Canadian* initially refused to support this physical resistance, further alienating its readership. It was the Mass Evacuation Group and its supporters who forced the BCSC to change its evacuation policy and achieved evacuation by family units [1].

Editorial Phase 2 (1943–1944): The Shift to Open Resistance

The ideological rift between the newspaper and the community finally healed in January 1943, marking a dramatic shift in *The New Canadian's* editorial stance. On January 19, 1943, the federal government passed Order-in-Council P.C. 469, granting the Custodian of Enemy Property absolute authority to liquidate all seized Japanese Canadian real estate, businesses, and personal effects without the owners' consent. This shattered the government's previous promise to hold properties in a "protective trust".

Recognizing this absolute betrayal, Shoyama abandoned his policy of quiet compliance. In a scathing editorial published on July 1, 1944, he aggressively condemned the forced liquidations as an indefensible assault on their rights, famously denouncing the seizures as the "dictates of a race war". The newspaper pivoted from an organ of cautious cooperation to a vital instrument of community protest, documenting the state's financial and systemic injustices and actively fighting for property rights. [2]

The Paradox of State Censorship

It appears deeply contradictory that a wartime government would allow its only permitted minority newspaper to publish such scathing critiques. However, the federal Director of Censorship and the Censor of Enemy-Language Publications permitted this editorial leeway for several highly pragmatic, strategic reasons rooted in psychological management and surveillance:

1. **Preventing an Underground Press:** Authorities knew that completely silencing 21,000 displaced individuals would inevitably lead to unmonitored underground communication

networks that could amplify rumours and incite uncoordinated unrest. A legal, monitored "safety valve" kept discourse visible.

2. **Psychological Management:** The BCSC recognized the internees' profound "impotent rage" over the theft of their property. Allowing Shoyama to print legally framed arguments channelled this dangerous frustration into reading and legal debates, drastically reducing the likelihood of physical camp riots.
3. **The "Panopticon" Surveillance Effect:** Because censors exhaustively reviewed carbon copies of every English and Japanese article via wire before publication, Shoyama's critiques functioned as voluntary intelligence-gathering tools. They provided the state with a flawless, real-time window into the community's morale, political fractures, and exact breaking points.
4. **Framed Patriotism:** Shoyama never advocated for violent rebellion or support for the Axis powers. His criticisms were strictly anchored in Canadian constitutionalism and British fair play. Because he demanded justice through safe, legal avenues—such as the Exchequer Court—censors viewed his influence as stabilizing.
5. **Maintaining Credibility:** If the newspaper had acted solely as a sterile mouthpiece, ignoring the community's obvious suffering, the *Issei* would have completely ignored it, rendering the BCSC unable to transmit its relocation directives.

This leniency, however, was a precarious balancing act with strict limits. In June 1944, after the paper published a blistering attack on the intensely racist rhetoric of Vancouver Mayor J.W. Cornett, federal censors threatened to shut the publication down permanently. Shoyama narrowly saved the newspaper by penning his historic Dominion Day editorial, "*Reaffirming a Purpose*" (July 1, 1944), in which he masterfully navigated the thin line between state censorship and civil rights advocacy by defending the paper's existence as a fight for the equal dignity and freedom of all citizens.

Chapter 3 The Post-War Era – Dispersal, Transformation, and Redress

Eastward Resettlement and the Fight Against Deportation

In 1945, the Canadian government finally lifted its ban on Japanese Canadian military enlistment. Tom Shoyama immediately resigned as editor to volunteer for the Canadian Army's S-20 Intelligence Corps, receiving training in the Japanese language until his discharge in 1946. Under the new English-language editorship of Kasey Oyama, the newspaper relocated to Winnipeg, Manitoba, in late 1945 to closely track the community's post-war dispersal.

During this "Winnipeg interregnum," the paper entered a new phase of fierce advocacy. It strongly promoted the eastward resettlement of Japanese Canadians, viewing dispersal east of the Rockies as the most viable path to prove assimilability and preserve the community's future. Simultaneously, the newspaper launched a vigorous campaign against the federal government's draconian attempts to deport (or "repatriate") Japanese Canadians to a starving Japan. *The New Canadian* exhorted the *Nisei* to join the anti-deportation resistance, condemning the deportation Orders-in-Council as a direct violation of human rights. To dismantle the state narrative that they were "enemy aliens," the paper also

prominently highlighted the heroic contributions of *Nisei* soldiers who had served in the Canadian military.

The Shift to Community Service and Cultural Preservation (1950s–1970s)

By 1949, the political landscape shifted dramatically. Liberalism and humanitarianism began to be extended to ethnic minorities, and the severe movement restrictions against Japanese Canadians were lifted. The community gained the franchise, and many migrated to eastern urban centers like Toronto to rebuild their lives. With the *Nisei* integrating into mainstream Canadian society and achieving economic stability, the English-language pages of *The New Canadian*—now relocated to Toronto—lost their former militant passion. Under a succession of editors, including Toyo Takata, Ken Adachi, and Kei Casey Tsumura, the English section transitioned into a soft-news publication focused on historical preservation, social events, and cultural commentary. Having fulfilled its civil rights mission, it was occasionally and affectionately derided by some as the "Nisei Bowling Club newsletter".

Conversely, the Japanese-language section underwent a profound transformation to serve the aging *Issei* population. In late 1948, a new rival newspaper, the *Tairiku Jiho*, was launched as a successor to the pre-war conservative heavyweight, the *Tairiku Nippo*. This sparked a fierce battle for the remaining *Issei* readership. To survive, *The New Canadian* completely separated its English and Japanese editorial sections. Under the dedicated leadership of Takaichi Umezuki and, later, publisher Ken Mori, the Japanese section ceased to be a mere news organization; it evolved into a vital community service agency and "life advice centre". Umezuki and his staff assisted the *Issei* with practical support, from advising on pension claims and naturalization paperwork to translating family registers and drafting death certificates. Although the rival *Jiho* was viewed as more sophisticated, the *Issei* remained fiercely loyal to *The New Canadian* due to the immense debt of gratitude they felt for the paper's dedicated wartime navigation, ensuring its survival as the longest-running newspaper in Japanese Canadian history.

The Redress Campaign and the Legacy of The New Canadian

During the 1980s, the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) launched a massive campaign demanding a formal government apology and individual compensation for the wartime abuses. During this era, *The New Canadian* adopted a centrist, moderate editorial position. While it supported the concept of Redress, its cautious tone drew significant criticism from younger, progressive *Sansei* (third-generation) activists, who argued the paper was too timid and overly reliant on government advertising revenues to endorse confrontational tactics. Nevertheless, the newspaper's meticulous wartime archives provided the indisputable documentary evidence required to prove the state's systemic rights violations, ultimately laying the constitutional blueprint that secured the historic 1988 Redress Settlement. Faced with an aging readership and shifting demographics, the grassroots community paper was eventually sold to Japan Communications in 1990, and it published its final edition in September 2001.

Conclusion

The history of Japanese Canadian newspapers is a testament to a community's unbreakable resilience. In the 1930s, the press reflected a vibrant, divided community struggling with racism and integration. During the dark years of the Second World War, *The New Canadian* was co-opted by the state yet

ingeniously utilized by its staff to document injustices and channel the community's outrage into a framework of constitutional rights. While the direct, physical resistance of the *Issei* and the Mass Evacuation Group in 1942 successfully defeated the government's draconian family-separation policies in the short term, *the New Canadian* preserved the institutional memory of citizenship. In the post-war era, the press shifted its focus to community healing, cultural preservation, and practical service. Together, the physical resistance on the ground and the intellectual resistance on the page ensured that Japanese Canadians survived the ultimate test of their democracy, laying the foundation for historical justice and a fully realized Canadian identity.

Appendix

What was the significance of the 1943 property liquidation editorial?

The 1943 property liquidation editorial published in *The New Canadian* held profound political and social significance for the Japanese Canadian community, acting as the catalyst that transformed the newspaper from a compliant publication into a vital instrument of community protest and legal resistance.

Published on January 30, 1943, immediately following the passage of Order-in-Council P.C. 469, the editorial marked the **definitive end of editor Tom Shoyama's strategic policy of "cooperation and calm"**. Previously, Shoyama believed that orderly compliance with the forced relocation would prove the community's loyalty and secure their post-war citizenship rights. However, the government's decision to forcibly sell all Japanese Canadian-owned land, homes, and businesses without consent shattered the state's prior legal promise to hold these assets safely in a "protective trust". Recognizing this absolute betrayal, Shoyama dropped his pragmatic restraint and aggressively condemned the forced liquidations, famously denouncing the dispossession as the **"dictates of a race war"**.

Crucially, this editorial shift **healed a bitter generational and ideological fracture** within the uprooted community. During the initial evacuations of 1941 and 1942, the first-generation *Issei* deeply resented the newspaper's conciliatory stance. They viewed the young *Nisei* editors as dangerously naive state collaborators, or "Inu" (informers), who were sacrificing their parents' lifelong economic achievements for abstract political theories. By forcefully pivoting to defend the community's hard-earned property rights, *The New Canadian* finally shed its reputation among the *Issei* as a sterile "government mouthpiece". The editorial provided a unifying cause that allowed the *Issei* and *Nisei* to find common ground, transforming the publication into a unified voice for the survival of the entire community.

Ultimately, the editorial's significance lies in its role as a foundation for long-term justice. By pivoting to become an active agent of resistance, the newspaper became a vital platform for documenting the state's financial and systemic injustices. The legalistic and rights-based language championed in this editorial and subsequent issues kept the concept of Canadian citizenship alive, creating the intellectual blueprint and institutional memory that the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) would rely upon decades later to secure the historic 1988 Redress apology and compensation.

Tell me about the 1942 strikes and family internment camps.

In early 1942, the Canadian government's original plan for the mass uprooting of Japanese Canadians did not include building family internment camps. When the federal government invoked the *War*

Measures Act, the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) designed a draconian policy aimed at completely dismantling the community through systematic family separation.

Under this initial plan, **all non-disabled Japanese Canadian men between the ages of 18 and 45 were ordered to be sent immediately to isolated, primitive road-construction camps** in the British Columbia interior and Ontario to perform forced labour. Meanwhile, women, children, and older people were to be left behind, temporarily packed into livestock buildings at Vancouver's Hastings Park, before being shipped off to separate ghost-town settlements or Prairie sugar beet farms. The state calculated that separating men from their families would break the community's collective spirit, making them easier to control and permanently disperse across Canada after the war.

However, this policy was shattered by a massive wave of direct, boots-on-the-ground resistance. Led predominantly by the **Nisei Mass Evacuation Group (MEG)** and supported by first-generation *Issei* parents, Japanese Canadians launched organized strikes and acts of defiance. Hundreds of young *Nisei* men who had been assigned to road camps near Jasper, Princeton, and Schreiber refused to work, staging strikes, ignoring roll calls, and demanding the fundamental human right of family reunification. Simultaneously in Vancouver, hundreds of men defied their individual evacuation notices, refusing to board the trains to the road camps. At the same time, their wives, children, and elderly parents were being held in the squalor of the Hastings Park stables.

The resistance grew so widespread that mainstream prisons began filling up with young Japanese Canadian men who willingly accepted arrest rather than abandon their families, causing a massive logistical logjam for federal authorities. The BCSC quickly realized that their forced-labour scheme was completely unworkable due to this mass non-cooperation. Fearing widespread riots and an absolute loss of control, the federal government was forced to abandon its road camp strategy completely.

To resolve the crisis, the BCSC pivoted and began rapidly constructing **unified family internment camps** in the Kootenays, including Tashme, Lemon Creek, New Denver, and Slocan. Ultimately, the only reason Japanese Canadian families were permitted to live together during the wartime internment was that the community fought tenaciously for it on the streets and in the labour camps during the 1942 strikes. This crucial physical resistance defeated the family-separation policy and prevented the complete fragmentation of the community, which would have otherwise made unified post-war organizing for justice incredibly difficult.

MEG and the New Canadian

During the turbulent spring of 1942, as the Canadian federal government invoked the War Measures Act to forcibly uproot over 22,000 Japanese Canadians from the Pacific Coast, a profound ideological and generational fracture split the community. This bitter division was most vividly embodied by the intense conflict between the staff of *The New Canadian* newspaper and the dissident political faction known as the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group (NMEG, or MEG). While both groups ultimately sought to navigate the catastrophic destruction of their communities, they adopted opposing strategies in dealing with the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC). *The New Canadian* championed a policy of strict, law-abiding cooperation with the state, whereas the Mass Evacuation Group launched a militant campaign of civil disobedience and direct physical resistance.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbour, the federal government immediately shut down all three major Japanese-language daily newspapers operating in Vancouver. *The New Canadian*, an English-language weekly originally founded in 1938 to serve the second-generation, Canadian-born *Nisei*, was the only publication permitted to continue operating. Placed under extreme government censorship and forced to add a Japanese-language section, the newspaper effectively became a bilingual state notice board used by the BCSC to transmit its draconian relocation directives to the community. Under the editorial leadership of Tom Shoyama, the newspaper adopted a strategic philosophy of "cooperation and calm" during the initial phases of the 1942 uprooting. Shoyama sincerely believed that if the *Nisei* behaved as flawless, cooperative citizens during this national crisis, they would definitively prove their absolute loyalty to Canada. He argued that peaceful compliance with the BCSC's orders would deny racist politicians any ammunition to label them as a "fifth column". He would ultimately secure their constitutional rights in the post-war era. Consequently, the paper repeatedly urged the community to obey the government and famously published the editorial mantra to "Have Faith in Canada".

However, the BCSC's initial evacuation policy was ruthlessly designed to fragment the Japanese Canadian community through systematic family separation. Under this draconian scheme, all non-disabled Japanese Canadian men between the ages of 18 and 45 were ordered to leave their families behind and report for forced labour at isolated road construction camps in the interior of British Columbia and Ontario. Meanwhile, women, children, and older people were temporarily herded into the filthy, maggot-encrusted livestock barns at Vancouver's Hastings Park, waiting to be shipped to ghost towns or Prairie sugar beet farms. This policy of family separation sparked absolute terror and outrage. Because *The New Canadian* and its aligned *Nisei* leadership (the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Council) backed the government's orderly separation plans and urged compliance, they rapidly alienated the vast majority of the community.

In direct defiance of both the BCSC orders and the conciliatory editorial advice of *The New Canadian*, a powerful coalition of older *Nisei* and first-generation *Issei* formed the Mass Evacuation Group in early 1942. Led by expelled members of the Citizens' Council, including Fujikazu Tanaka, Robert Shimoda, and Shigeichi Uchibori, the MEG launched a massive campaign of organized non-cooperation. On April 15, 1942, they issued a formal manifesto to the government, explicitly stating that while they were willing to evacuate to wherever Canada commanded, they adamantly refused to accept the destruction of their families. When the government ignored their pleas, the MEG responded with aggressive physical resistance. Hundreds of young *Nisei* men assigned to road camps near Jasper, Princeton, and Schreiber staged labour strikes, ignored roll calls, and flatly refused to work. In Vancouver, hundreds more defied their individual evacuation notices, refusing to board the trains as long as their wives and children were being held in the squalor of Hastings Park. Some men even barricaded themselves inside the Vancouver Immigration Shed, demanding to be interned rather than separated from their loved ones.

The relationship between the Mass Evacuation Group and *The New Canadian* during this period was characterized by profound animosity and distrust. The *Issei*, who were legally barred from citizenship, viewed Shoyama's idealistic faith in Canadian democracy as dangerously naive nonsense. Furthermore, because it was the *Issei* who stood to lose their lifelong economic achievements—their fishing fleets in Steveston, their farms in the Fraser Valley, and their businesses on Powell Street—they felt deeply betrayed by the young *Nisei* journalists. They accused the newspaper of sacrificing their parents' hard-earned livelihoods on the altar of an abstract political theory regarding future citizenship. Because *The*

New Canadian refused to support the MEG's non-violent resistance and instead functioned as an instrument of state communication, furious *Issei* and MEG supporters openly branded the paper's editors as "Inu" (dogs or state informers) who were collaborating with an oppressive regime. The newspaper was widely dismissed as a sterile "government mouthpiece," with some hostile detainees claiming they only waited for the paper to arrive so they could use it as "latrine paper".

This bitter generational and ideological feud only began to heal in early 1943, catalyzed by a shocking betrayal by the federal government. On January 19, 1943, the Cabinet passed Order-in-Council P.C. 469, granting the Custodian of Enemy Property the absolute authority to forcibly liquidate and sell off all seized Japanese Canadian real estate, businesses, and personal belongings without the owners' consent. This action completely shattered the state's prior legal promise to hold the community's assets in a protective trust. Recognizing this ultimate betrayal, Tom Shoyama and the staff of *The New Canadian* finally admitted that their strategy of docile compliance had failed. In a historic editorial published on January 30, 1943, Shoyama abandoned his professional restraint, aggressively attacking the government's actions as an indefensible assault dictated by a "race war".

By pivoting to condemn the state's unconstitutional overreach and to fight for the community's property rights actively, *The New Canadian* finally aligned itself with the raw outrage of the Mass Evacuation Group and the *Issei*. The newspaper ceased to be viewed merely as an instrument of state control and transformed into a vital, unified voice of protest for the entire displaced population.

Ultimately, historical analysts recognize that the relationship between the Mass Evacuation Group and *The New Canadian* represents a symbiotic, two-front struggle for justice that operated on completely different timelines. The MEG's direct, boots-on-the-ground resistance achieved a monumental short-term victory in 1942. By filling mainstream prisons with resisters and paralyzing the government's logistics, the MEG's defiance forced the BCSC to abandon its draconian family-separation policy and construct unified "ghost town" family internment camps in the Kootenays, preserving the core social fabric of the community. Conversely, *The New Canadian* secured the long-term victory. Without the newspaper's exhaustive, legalistic documentation of the property thefts and its relentless articulation of human rights throughout the war, the community would have lacked the institutional memory and the constitutional blueprint required by the National Association of Japanese Canadians to secure the historic 1988 Redress Settlement successfully. Together, the physical resistance of the MEG and the intellectual resistance of *The New Canadian* ensured the ultimate survival and vindication of Japanese Canadians.

Footnotes

[1] The New Canadian, July 4, 1942, had the following articles:

[A newspaper article](#)

"New Policy for Evacuation Group"

VANCOUVER, B.C. In a statement issued Wednesday, the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group announced that it had decided to change its policy of opposition to one of co-operation with the Security Commission.

This policy change followed the announcement by the Commission (reported in the July 1 New Canadian) that its plans to reunite families and prevent future break-ups had advanced considerably after meetings with federal authorities and government officials in Alberta and Ontario.

It is understood that the remaining leaders of the Mass evacuation group had decided upon this change after interviews with members of the Security Commission.

The Commission stated that it would try to reunite men with their wives and children and prevent the need to break up families.

These interviews, it is said, stressed that the Commission, so far as possible, would reunite the men with their wives and children and attempt to place family units to prevent the necessity of breaking up families.

A committee of the group, headed by Shigeichi Uchibori, will assist with the evacuation of families in the Vancouver area. An office has been set up at 573 East Hastings Street. In its statement, the group said, "We appeal to all persons to realize this change of situation and to support us in our new policy, and to cooperate with the authorities."

The Editorial

"Family Evacuation"

The morale of the whole community has received a significant boost this week, with the British Columbia Security Commission reaffirming its original intention to seek the ultimate reunion of all evacuated families and outlining proposals to achieve that end. While the broad outline has been drawn, the details have not yet been fully made public. In any event, it would be foolish to assume, as some already seem to have done, that the evacuation problems will soon end.

On the contrary, much inconvenience and discomfort must yet be borne, and patience will be our chief asset in overcoming the many difficulties we must yet expect to face.

It should be recalled now that early in the evacuation program, when the road camps were being established, the whole community was deeply concerned because it was not yet possible to detail a plan to move men with their families.

Nevertheless, the assurances given by Major Austin C. Taylor and the members of the Security Commission, that such separation would be temporary, and that every effort would be made to devise a more reasonable and satisfactory method of evacuation, were taken in good faith by the majority of the people who have since done their best to co-operate patiently in this far-reaching emergency measure.

These assurances, as is well known, were repeatedly given by Major Taylor and his associates to various representatives of the community. They were, in fact, delivered to a public meeting held April 7 in Vancouver by Mr. Kunio Shimizu, speaking on behalf of the Japanese Canadian Citizens Council and the Naturalized Canadian Japanese Association.

The New Canadian of April 10 reported that meeting in part as follows:

Speaking for the Nisei Council, Mr. Shimizu declared that in the opinion of the Council, the interests of the whole community, men, women, and children, could best be safeguarded through co-operating with the authorities. After weeks of negotiations with the Commission, during which the main issue had always been the separation of families as units, the Council had concluded that temporary separation could not be avoided; he further added that the Council feels that the Commission is sincere in its expressed intention of working for the ultimate reuniting of every lost family.

The Commission announcement of this week, therefore, means ... the welcome fulfilment of implied pledges made previously, and wholly vindicates the position of all those who urged that co-operation with the government would ... assurance for every single one of us the very best possible treatment in this time of national crisis.

Now, so that this may be expressed in more certain terms, a fitting degree of fairness to the country which in past years has bordered its measures upon the highest was not ... the regrettable incidents have been avoided if a greater degree of prudence and restraint had been exercised.

My comments

In the editorial, the New Canadian said that the BC Security Committee announced the evacuation by family units because this was its original plan, and the separation of males from their families was just a temporary measure.

[2] The Shift to Open Resistance to the Government of the New Canadian

The turning point came in January 1943 when the federal government passed an Order-in-Council authorizing the Custodian of Enemy Property to seize and sell all Japanese Canadian-owned land, homes, businesses, and personal belongings. Up until this point, the government had promised that properties were being held in a "protective trust."

With this absolute betrayal of property and citizenship rights, *The New Canadian's* editorial tone shifted from urging calm cooperation to open, sharp critique of federal overreach and injustice:

- **Critique of Dispossession (1943):** Shoyama's editorials began forcefully condemning the forced liquidations, framing the destruction of their economic foundation as a permanent assault on their rights as Canadian citizens. The paper became a vital platform for documenting these financial and systemic injustices.
- **The "Reaffirming a Purpose" Crossroads (1944):** By mid-1944, the paper's adversarial stance against state racism and forced dispersal policies grew so sharp that federal censors threatened to shut the publication down entirely. Shoyama responded head-on with a historic editorial on Dominion Day (July 1, 1944) titled "*Reaffirming a Purpose*", where he explicitly stated that the paper's fundamental reason for existing was to fight for the right of every citizen, irrespective of racial origin, to walk with equal dignity and freedom.

Appendix

The New Canadian, July 1, 1944, "Editorial"

Re-affirming a Purpose

Despite all the things that have been said and done since Pearl Harbour and despite all the things which becloud the horizon, this Dominion Day serves as an appropriate time to reaffirm here the fundamental purpose for the existence of this newspaper.

That purpose, simply, is to fill a long and fight to establish the right and privilege of every citizen of the Dominion, irrespective of his racial origin, to walk with equal dignity, freedom and service among his fellow Canadians.

Over five years ago, The New Canadian dedicated itself to a particular phase of that purpose. It was to seek the fulfillment of the democratic aspirations of the particular Japanese Canadian minority, which formed a small but important part of Canada's all-important problem of establishing a nationhood and citizenship of enduring value. And nothing that has developed since—not even a rampant display of racial intolerance such as would surely fill with dismay the Fathers of Confederation, who seventy-seven years ago sought to bridge a deep racial division, if they dreamt of it. Canadian nationhood has led us away from that fundamental task. Perhaps the fresh enthusiasm and bright belief of five years ago have been worn thin, battered by many rebuffs and setbacks. Yet the underlying faith remains that our purpose is altogether worthwhile, but awaits, more than the continuing setbacks, our own hearts, minds, and hands for its establishment.

We point today to the substantial evidence of a large and powerful reservoir of genuine goodwill and democratic conviction in Canada, which is opposed to the emotional prejudice and blind bigotry of some Canadians. The front page of this issue of The New Canadian offers this startling contrast, revealing that the principles and traditions taught us in Canadian schools are not empty-sounding phrases to be tossed lightly aside for cheap advantage. We would adjure one thousand of Japanese Canadian readers to ponder upon this evidence and this sign. It will surely serve to strengthen their purpose and spirit, just as it has done for us.

Dangerous Precedent

The proposal to exclude citizens of Japanese racial origin from the right to vote in federal elections anywhere in Canada, contained in Section 5 of Bill 135, amending the Dominion Elections Act, serves vividly to illustrate once again the fundamental threat implied in public policies of racial discrimination. Where disabilities are imposed upon one group of citizens, a precedent is automatically established which opens the door for similar impositions upon many other citizens. If basic principles are knowingly and wilfully violated once, there can be no safeguard that they will not be violated again, even for much less reason.

It is this point which has provoked the editorial concern of three leading Canadian dailies, discussing the implications of Section 5 of the wartime Election Amendments Bill which would disqualify:

"Every person residing in Canada whose racial origin is that of a country at war with Canada if such a person at the time of a Dominion election would be disqualified by reason of race in any one of the provinces of Canada while residing therein from voting at an election of a member of the legislative assembly of that province."

It seems that the intent of the clause is to provide for the exclusion of Japanese Canadian citizens from franchise rights at present, since provincial disqualification on racial grounds applies only to those of

Oriental origin in British Columbia. But apart altogether from the damaging effects the bill may have upon the continued progress of resettlement of Japanese Canadians and the impact upon the structure of Canadian democracy, it has far wider implications. As both the Toronto Star and the Winnipeg Free Press readily perceive, the particular section opens the way for an "assault on the franchise rights of thousands of Canadian citizens," including those of German, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian and Finnish descent. Nor is it only a temporary wartime measure, but no provision is made for the lapse of this amendment at the end of hostilities.

Both the direct effects the bill may have upon the Japanese Canadian group and its further implications therefore have prompted a commendable criticism from many interested groups and individuals, who rightfully lay great value upon the stature of Canadian citizenship. There is hope that before the measure becomes law, Parliament will take steps to effect needed changes in the bill. Indeed, if Parliament is fully aware of the continuing threat to the sanctity of Canadian citizenship contained in so much of the current war hysteria, it will give the bill the same answer that ought to be given to the fascist-like agitation for postwar expulsion of natural-born and naturalized Canadian citizens of Japanese racial origin.