

A History of Japanese Canadian Resistance to the Authorities

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Japanese Canadians have demonstrated active, organized resistance, opposition, and civil disobedience against discriminatory Canadian authorities since their arrival in Canada. I have compiled a list of major incidents before, during and after World War II.

Notably, regarding sabotage, the sources explicitly confirm that no person of Japanese race born or naturalized in Canada was ever charged with or found guilty of any act of sabotage or disloyalty against the state before, during, or after the war.

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Here is a chronological list of their protests and resistance:

I. Before World War II

1. The Tomekichi Homma Franchise Battle (1900)

Summary

Tomekichi Homma launched the earliest major challenge to systemic disenfranchisement by suing the Collector of Voters for refusing to put his name on the B.C. voters' list. He fought this exclusion all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and the Privy Council.

Main text

The systemic disenfranchisement of Japanese Canadians in British Columbia was legally cemented in 1895 when the provincial legislature amended the Provincial Elections Act, extending a clause that already deprived Chinese Canadians of the right to vote to also explicitly exclude Japanese Canadians. This denial of the franchise became the ultimate symbol of second-class citizenship, fundamentally stripping Canadian-born and naturalized citizens of their most basic democratic right. While the immigrant generation initially focused on economic survival, disenfranchisement became a critical issue as they put down roots. The most significant and earliest legal challenge to this institutional racism was launched in 1900 by Tomekichi (Tomey) Homma, marking the beginning of a protracted, multi-decade civil rights struggle.

Tomekichi Homma was a prominent pioneer in the Japanese Canadian community, a naturalized British subject, a Vancouver boarding housekeeper, an employment agent, and the head of the Fraser River Japanese Fishermen's Association. On October 19, 1900, Homma formally applied to Thomas Cunningham, the Collector of Voters for the electoral district of Vancouver, to have his name entered onto the voters' list. Cunningham outright refused the application, invoking Section 8 of the Provincial Elections Act, which bluntly stated: "No Chinaman, Japanese, or Indian shall have his name placed on the Register of Voters for any Electoral District, or be entitled to vote at any election". When Homma informed the Collector that he intended to have this discriminatory decision reviewed in the County Court, Cunningham stubbornly replied that no matter the outcome, he would never put an Asiatic name on the list, declaring that he "would go to jail first".

Homma's legal challenge was not a solitary endeavour; it was backed by a highly coordinated grassroots effort within the Japanese Canadian community. Recognizing the monumental importance of the case, Homma, alongside fellow community leader Yasushi Yamazaki, organized a fundraising campaign to cover the steep legal costs. **The community mobilized impressively, collecting 50 cents each from approximately 4,000 Japanese compatriots living in Canada at the time, successfully raising the \$1,500 required to take the British Columbia government to court.**

Initially, the Canadian judicial system delivered a resounding victory for Homma and the Japanese Canadian community. On November 30, 1900, Chief Justice McColl of the Supreme Court of British Columbia handed down a judgment declaring that the provincial clause barring naturalized Japanese Canadians from voting was *ultra vires*—meaning it was beyond the legal jurisdiction and constitutional power of the provincial legislature. Chief Justice McColl ordered that Homma's name be placed on the

voters' list, thoughtfully noting that "the residence within the province of large numbers of persons, British subjects in name, but doomed to perpetual exclusion from any part in the passage of legislation effecting their property or civil rights would surely not be to the advantage of Canada and might even become a source of national danger". When the provincial government appealed this ruling, the Supreme Court of Canada sustained McColl's progressive decision on March 9, 1901, upholding Homma's right to the franchise.

However, this victory triggered an immediate and vitriolic backlash from the white political establishment and the local press. The *Vancouver Daily Province* dedicated its entire front page to the issue under the headline "Japs Cannot Vote," raising xenophobic fears and accusing the Conservative Party of a "daring and disreputable" plot to fraudulently naturalize a "Japanese bloc" of voters to sway local elections. Driven by this intense anti-Asian political climate, the British Columbia government refused to concede and escalated the legal battle, appealing the Supreme Court of Canada's decision to the highest appellate court in the British Empire: the Privy Council in London.

In a devastating blow to civil liberties, the Privy Council reversed the Canadian courts' decisions on December 17, 1902. The Privy Council ruled that the discriminatory provincial legislation was, in fact, *intra vires* (within the province's constitutional powers). The court's logic relied on a strict interpretation of the British North America Act, separating the federal jurisdiction over "naturalization and aliens" from the provincial jurisdiction over "civil rights". Consequently, the ruling established that while the federal government controlled who could become a citizen, a Canadian province possessed the absolute power to enact legislation discriminating on the basis of race and could legally withhold the franchise from Canadian citizens based solely on their racial origin.

The fallout from the Privy Council's decision was catastrophic, as **the denial of the franchise extended far beyond the simple act of casting a ballot; it served as a *de facto* colour bar that systematically locked Japanese Canadians out of the broader economic and civic life of the province.** Because the federal government customarily utilized the provincial voters' lists to compile the Dominion voting rolls, Homma's defeat meant that Japanese Canadians were automatically barred from voting in federal elections as well. Furthermore, the province actively weaponized the voters' list as a prerequisite for civic participation and employment. Japanese Canadians were legally excluded from running for the provincial legislature, holding any municipal office, serving as school trustees, or fulfilling jury duty.

Economically, the disenfranchisement was used to strictly curtail their livelihoods. Japanese Canadians were barred from obtaining hand-logging licenses and from being employed on any public works contracts authorized by the Department of Public Works, which mandated that no "Asiatic" could be employed directly or indirectly. The professional class was similarly suffocated; the Law Society of British Columbia and the provincial pharmacy by-laws required applicants to be on the voters' list, effectively banning Japanese Canadians from practicing law or pharmacy. Other *de facto* barriers linked to the franchise locked them out of the civil service, including jobs in the police force, forestry, the post office, and public health nursing.

The bitter defeat of the Tomekichi Homma case in 1902 entrenched a framework of systemic racial subordination that Japanese Canadians would be forced to endure for the next half-century, setting the stage for the extreme wartime abuses they would later face. **It was not until almost fifty years later that the systemic disenfranchisement Homma fought so hard to dismantle was finally abolished.**

Following the end of World War II, growing liberal pressure and shifting public opinion finally discredited British Columbia's racist traditions. The federal franchise was granted to Japanese Canadians on June 15, 1948, and recognizing the futility of continuing the ban, the British Columbia legislature finally extended the provincial vote on March 24, 1949.

In a profoundly poignant historical closing, Tomekichi Homma's own son, Seiji Homma, was serving as the provincial president of the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association (JCCA) when the British Columbia legislature finally passed the enfranchisement bill in 1949. Upon receiving the news of the victory, an overwhelmed Seiji Homma reflected on the ultimate triumph of his father's long-defeated struggle, stating:

"What a coincidence that I should be an eyewitness to the climax of the work begun by my father 49 years ago! ... If only Dad could have been here with us to experience this victory. He would have been thrilled, as we were, by the news".

2. Labour Strikes and Armed Self-Defence of the Fraser River Japanese Fishermen's Association (1900–1901)

Summary

Japanese Canadian fishermen formed the Fraser River Japanese Fishermen's Association and engaged in militant labour actions. In 1900, to resist white unions and canneries, Yamazaki took up an armed night watch at the Japanese hospital. In 1901, facing violent patrols from white unions, Japanese Canadian fishermen armed themselves, organized their own patrol boats, and actively fought back with logs and sticks on the open water.

Main text

By the turn of the century, Japanese immigrants had established a formidable and highly efficient presence in the British Columbia fishing industry. Of the 4,722 fishing licenses issued in the province in 1901, Japanese fishermen held 1,958, indicating that over 4,000 Japanese were engaged in the industry primarily around the Fraser River. Their remarkable skill and willingness to accept lower prices in a highly competitive, hazardous industry bred intense racial animosity among white and Indigenous fishermen, who often transcended their own differences to form a united front against them. This festering racial tension erupted into some of the most spectacular and violent industrial disputes in the history of the province during the Fraser River fishing strikes of 1900 and 1901, revealing a community that was anything but docile.

The 1900 season opened against a backdrop of severe economic tension and a dispute over the price of sockeye salmon. The white-led B.C. Fishermen's Union demanded twenty-five cents per fish, while the canners countered with an offer of fifteen to twenty cents. Initially, the Japanese fishermen, loosely organized under the Japanese Fishermen's Association in Steveston, stood in solidarity with the white union by striking in sympathy. However, their position was uniquely vulnerable: unlike white fishermen who typically owned their own homes and boats, most Japanese were contract labourers living in cannery-owned housing and completely reliant on the canners for food and equipment.

When the canneries began withholding food supplies to break the Japanese resistance, desperate fishermen faced starvation. When some frustrated Japanese contractors attempted to fish, white union members rowed out and violently threw their catches into the sea. Soon, rumours circulated that the Japanese had agreed to fish for twenty cents and were arming themselves. In response, white strikers staged a choleric "show of strength" in Steveston on July 7, posting notices that threatened to shoot or smash the boats of any Japanese fishermen who sold fish below union rates.

Refusing to be intimidated or starved out, the Japanese fishermen organized a militant defence of their community and livelihood. To lead them, they recruited Yasushi Yamazaki, a tough former U.S. Navy sailor with a reputation for insubordination and fighting, to head their association. With rumours swirling that white mobs might burn down the newly established Japanese hospital in Steveston, Yamazaki stood night watch alone with a pistol, exchanging gunfire with unseen attackers in the dark. The Japanese fishermen actively conducted fighting drills to prepare for white assaults. After securing a rate of twenty cents per fish from the canneries, the Japanese declared they would commence fishing on July 24, a move that amounted to a declaration of war against the white union.

To demonstrate their immense strength and unity, an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 Japanese staged a massive parade through Steveston on July 22 and 23, crying "Banzai" and singing "Long Live the Empire". Facing an armed Indigenous population, furious white strikers, and a Japanese force that refused to submit meekly, the canneries panicked and requested military intervention. Canadian authorities declared martial law and dispatched 160 soldiers from the Duke of Connaught's Own militia to Steveston, with the commanding officer warning his troops would fire at the first sign of interference. Escorted by police and the military, 2,000 Japanese fishermen boldly took to the open river, effectively breaking the strike.

The following year, the 1901 season witnessed the greatest sockeye run in the province's history, but the conflict shifted from the village streets to open-water warfare. Recognizing that the Japanese could not be intimidated on land, the white union changed its tactics and deployed armed patrol boats to violently prevent the Japanese from fishing. What followed was a week of wild, hand-to-hand naval combat on the Fraser River. **White union patrols rammed Japanese boats, cut their nets, and engaged in brutal physical combat, using oars, sticks, and axes to batter the Japanese into insensibility.** In one severe incident, twelve white patrol boats surrounded five unarmed Japanese vessels, levelled rifles at the men, chopped up their boats, and marooned them on Bowen Island. Two Japanese fishermen were reported missing and presumed dead after their boat was found adrift in English Bay.

The Japanese response to this terrorism was swift and highly organized armed self-defence. They formally divided their fleets, with half the men fishing and the other half serving as armed escorts. They deployed their own patrol boats to protect their workers on the water. Yamazaki commanded the cannery flagship *Albion*, which patrolled the waters nightly with police officers on board to search for white attackers. On the night of July 10, after several Japanese boats failed to return, Yamazaki and an armed crew launched a rescue and retaliation mission. **They discovered five freshly wrecked Japanese boats covered in blood and soon encountered a white vessel whose crew pointed pistols at them. Aided by the police, the Japanese overpowered the attackers, tied them up, and marched them three miles to the Vancouver police station.** Yamazaki also utilized his patrol boat to rescue the Japanese fishermen who had been exiled to the islands by white mobs.

The Japanese did not stop at physical self-defence; they aggressively pursued their attackers through the Canadian legal system. When captured white attackers were brought to trial, Japanese fishermen bravely marched through hostile, packed courtrooms to publicly identify the men who had assaulted them. Although they faced deeply prejudiced white juries—who, in some cases, acquitted attackers despite explicit advice from the judge and clear evidence of kidnapping and robbery—the Japanese persistence paid off. Several ringleaders of the white union were successfully convicted and sentenced to hard labour, severely dampening the white fishermen's enthusiasm for open violence.

The strikes of 1900 and 1901 thoroughly shattered the stereotype of early Japanese Canadians as docile or submissive victims. Faced with severe economic extortion, deeply entrenched racial hostility, and lethal physical violence, the fishermen of the Fraser River mobilized a sophisticated campaign of armed self-defence, militant community solidarity, and legal counterattacks. Their resolute and organized resistance ensured their survival in the industry, forcing both the canneries and the hostile white unions to recognize them as a formidable, unyielding labour force that would fight fiercely for its right to exist in British Columbia.

3. The Vancouver Riot Counterattack (1907)

Summary

When an anti-Asian mob attacked the Powell Street enclave, Japanese Canadians formed a self-defence vigilance committee. Crying "Banzai," they actively repelled the rioters using sticks, clubs, iron bars, knives, bottles, and a barrage of rocks from rooftops, thoroughly breaking the mob's advance.

Main text

By the late summer of 1907, anti-Asian agitation in British Columbia had reached a boiling point, fueled by politicians, labour unions, and a sensationalist press. Formed in August of that year, the Asiatic Exclusion League organized a massive demonstration for September 7 to protest the influx of Asian immigrants. What began as a parade from the Cambie Street grounds quickly swelled to an estimated 8,000 people milling around Vancouver's City Hall. The crowd was whipped into a frenzy by inflammatory speeches from figures such as the Reverend H.W. Fraser, who warned that the province's Anglo-Saxon blood would be ruined, and A.E. Fowler, secretary of Seattle's Asiatic Exclusion League, who incited the crowd by referencing recent violent expulsions of Asians in Washington State. A spark of violence ignited when a brick was thrown through a Chinese store window, unleashing a mob that swept through Pender Street's Chinatown, leaving a trail of shattered glass and ransacked stores. The Chinese residents barricaded their doors and offered no resistance, leaving their properties at the mercy of the rioters.

Unsatisfied with the lack of confrontation and spurred by voices in the crowd shouting, "Let's attack the Japs," the mob, estimated at about a thousand strong, redirected its fury north on Westminister Street toward Powell Street, the heart of the Japanese Canadian community known as "Little Tokyo". The first target to bear the brunt of their violence was a large dry food store run by the Kawasaki brothers on the corner of Powell and Westminister. The mob showered the store with stones, instantly shattering its large glass windows and reducing it to shambles. Sweeping down the street, the rioters continued to smash windows and damage dozens of Japanese-owned homes and businesses. However, unlike the passive

response encountered in Chinatown, the mob was about to face a highly organized and militant counterattack.

As word of the approaching mob spread, a deadly hush fell over Powell Street; lights were turned off, and the residents plunged the neighbourhood into a blackout, waiting in the dark. The Japanese Canadians swiftly mobilized a self-defence force. Saburo Yoshie, a clerk at the Imperial Consulate, along with other community figures like Yonekichi Aoyama, took active leadership roles. They gathered healthy young men—many of whom were single fishermen who had just returned from the Skeena River after the fishing season—and organized them into a vigilant defence unit. The defenders stockpiled "weapons" in the form of stones, bricks, and bottles on the rooftops of stores like the Kawasaki building, while a rescue team was formed to treat potential wounded, and women prepared food to sustain the fighters. Some defenders armed themselves with sticks, clubs, iron bars, and knives. One older man, Shigeichi Ohgawara, purportedly strapped on a Japanese sword and stood ready in "Pissing Alley," a narrow passage between Westminster and Gore Streets.

When the rioters launched their second wave of attacks later that evening, the Japanese Canadians unleashed a fierce and coordinated counter-offensive. Initially using defensive tactics by pelting the mob with rocks and bottles from the rooftops, the defenders soon sallied forth into the streets. Crying "Banzai!" they tore into the white mob with their improvised weapons. The rioters, who had expected easy victims, were completely taken aback by the fiery resistance. Hand-to-hand skirmishing erupted, and the Japanese Canadians fought with the discipline and intensity of soldiers. As one resident, Kosaburo Ichino, wryly recalled, "The riot was real war... I was like a soldier that night". The fierce counterattack left several rioters gashed, bleeding, and panicked, causing the white mob to waver, break, and ultimately retreat from the Japanese district. The English-language press later exaggerated the confrontation, reporting sensational tales of sword-wielding Japanese leading charges with broken bottles, but the reality was that the organized resistance thoroughly crushed the rioters' advance.

By nightfall, when police reinforcements finally arrived, the Japanese Canadians had already organized their own sentries and patrols to protect their district. The streets blazed with light from the windows of every store and house, signalling that the community was watchful and ready for any emergency. In fact, the police cordon that was eventually established around Powell Street likely saved the white mob from further damage by the indignant Japanese defenders, rather than the other way around. The atmosphere remained raw and volatile into Sunday; Japanese Canadians were indignant and in no mood to be submissive. Consul Morikawa and Mayor Bethune conferred, and Morikawa assured the Japanese that they could retire safely, though their sentries remained under the glare of arc lights until dawn. The usefulness of these community patrols was further demonstrated a few days later when they discovered and thwarted an arson attempt at the Japanese School on Alexander Street, extinguishing a fire set with coal oil-soaked rags before firefighters even arrived. In the days following the riot, the community prepared for further violence; rooftops remained piled with bricks and stones, and hardware stores quickly sold out of firearms and ammunition.

The forceful and successful counterattack by the Japanese Canadians in 1907 shattered any prevailing illusions that they were a docile minority willing to be victimized. Their militant defence earned them a grudging respect, albeit mixed with heightened anxiety, from Canadian officials. Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier reported to Governor-General Grey that "the Japs showed fight, a cause for rejoicing and for

anxiety; rejoicing because the rowdies got a well-deserved licking; anxiety because this may make the Japs very saucy". In the aftermath, the federal government dispatched Mackenzie King to assess the damages, ultimately awarding the Japanese Canadians \$9,036 in compensation. However, the riot also served as a catalyst for diplomatic intervention, directly leading to the Lemieux Agreement of 1908, in which Japan voluntarily restricted the emigration of male labourers to Canada to appease British Columbian hostility. Ultimately, the 1907 riot and the fierce Japanese Canadian counterattack stood as a defining moment of community solidarity, demonstrating their unwavering determination to defend their homes, their livelihoods, and their physical safety in an intensely hostile environment.

4. Unionization (1920)

Summary

Etsu Suzuki organized a Japanese Canadian Labour Union to combat exclusion, launching a newspaper and fighting against institutional labour discrimination.

Main text

During the early 20th century, Japanese immigrants in British Columbia faced a highly hostile environment characterized by systemic institutional discrimination and severe workplace exclusion. In the province's foundational industries, such as sawmilling and rail work, Japanese Canadians were relegated to the lowest-paying, most physically demanding jobs and were actively targeted by discriminatory wage laws. Furthermore, white labour unions, driven by racial prejudice and the fear of cheap labour competition, operated as aggressive exclusionists, frequently pushing the government to ban Asian workers entirely. In the face of this deeply entrenched economic marginalization, a pioneering intellectual, Etsu Suzuki, arrived to chart a radically different path for the Japanese Canadian community.

Etsu Suzuki was a highly educated and progressive thinker who fundamentally altered the landscape of Japanese Canadian Labour. A graduate of Waseda University with a degree in English Literature, Suzuki was married to the female novelist Toshiko Tamura and had established a career in Japan as a reporter and creative writer for the *Mancho* and *Asahi Shimbun*. In June 1918, he migrated to Canada after being invited to serve as the lead writer for the *Tairiku Nippo* (The Continental Daily), one of Vancouver's prominent Japanese-language newspapers. His arrival coincided with the height of the anti-Japanese exclusion movement, placing him at the center of a rapidly deteriorating economic crisis for his compatriots.

The catalyst for Suzuki's labour activism occurred in May 1920, when a strike broke out at the Swanson Bay paper mill. This industrial dispute, which involved a multi-racial workforce of white, Chinese, and Japanese labourers, highlighted the urgent need for formal organization among Asian workers. Inspired by the events at Swanson Bay, Suzuki spearheaded the creation of a Japanese Canadian labour union on July 1, 1920. Initially focused on workers in Vancouver, the organization quickly expanded to form branches throughout British Columbia and eventually became known as the Japanese Camp and Mill Workers Union. Unlike the traditional community groups dominated by older, conservative businessmen, Suzuki's union attracted a bloc of younger Issei (first-generation immigrants) who often possessed broader education and white-collar backgrounds.

Suzuki's ideology was rooted in the belief that the exclusion of Japanese Canadians was largely due to their "lack of education as workers". He argued that the only effective way to dismantle the barriers of racial discrimination was to thoroughly train and enlighten the Japanese Labour force. His goal was for Japanese Canadian workers to become educated enough to be on par with white Labourers, enabling them to shake hands as equals. Rather than retreating into an isolated, defensive posture, Suzuki's union actively advocated for meaningful contact, engagement, and cooperation with the mainstream white Labour movement, viewing class solidarity as the ultimate antidote to racism.

To propagate his vision and educate the workforce, Suzuki launched a weekly newspaper named *The Labour Weekly* on August 1, 1920. This publication served as the central organ of the union, dedicated to the enlightenment of its members and the dissemination of progressive labour strategies. As the movement gained traction, Suzuki evolved *The Labour Weekly* into a daily publication in 1924, renaming it *The People's Daily* (or *The Daily People*). Beyond journalism, the union sought to provide practical economic relief for its members by opening a retail cooperative and an employment bureau, which directly challenged the exploitative practices of traditional Labour contractors.

The most astonishing triumph of the Camp and Mill Workers Union was its successful affiliation with the very white Labour organizations that had historically spearheaded anti-Asian agitation. In 1927, Suzuki's union achieved a monumental breakthrough by officially joining the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC). This affiliation was particularly remarkable given that the TLC had long been one of the most vociferous and indefatigable enemies of immigrant Japanese Labourers, frequently condemning them as threats to both living and moral standards. Following this success, the union further integrated into the mainstream Labour apparatus by affiliating with the Vancouver, New Westminster and District Trades and Labour Council in 1931.

This unprecedented inter-racial alliance, however, was not born of pure altruism. The mainstream Labour movement recognized that their traditional strategy of exclusion was failing to protect white wages. The TLC concluded that the most pragmatic solution to the "problem" of Japanese competition was to absorb them into the union structure, effectively inviting them to become partners in the fight for higher overall pay. By raising the wage expectations and living standards of the Japanese workers, the white unions aimed to neutralize the employers' ability to use Asians for wage undercutting. Regardless of the underlying motives, the affiliation represented a massive structural victory for Japanese Canadians fighting institutional marginalization.

Empowered by its new alliances, the Camp and Mill Workers Union expanded its focus to encompass broad civil and political rights. At the 1931 TLC convention in Vancouver, the union successfully persuaded the Congress to endorse a formal request to British Columbia to amend the Provincial Elections Act. The union sought "equality of treatment and full rights of citizenship" for the Canadian-born Japanese. Additionally, the union took a firm and controversial stance on the issue of "dual citizenship," consistently advocating for the renunciation of Japanese citizenship to prove an undivided loyalty and commitment to Canada.

The union also distinguished itself through its progressive approach to the Nisei (the second-generation, Canadian-born youth). In an era when traditional Issei leaders frequently subjected the younger generation to harsh criticism and demanded strict adherence to Japanese customs, the Camp and Mill Workers Union publicly admired the Nisei. Suzuki and his followers wholeheartedly supported the

second generation's attempts to achieve closer rapprochement and integration with the broader white society, recognizing that the community's future depended on the success of the Nisei.

Despite its visionary leadership and remarkable successes, Suzuki's movement faced fierce internal opposition from within the Japanese Canadian community. The powerful Canadian Japanese Association (CJA), a conservative organization dominated by merchants and traditional power brokers, viewed the union as a direct threat, leading to open and bitter animosity between the two factions. The union's mild socialist leanings and its willingness to criticize Japan's growing militarism ran entirely against the conservative, pro-Japan grain of the "Little Tokyo" establishment. Furthermore, many traditional Issei found the very concept of unionism repugnant, as it conflicted with deep-seated cultural values regarding loyalty and indebtedness to employers.

Some critics also viewed Suzuki's idealism as detached from the era's brutal realities. For instance, his encouragement for Japanese fishermen to join hands with white fishermen as "workers of the same class" seemed naive during the 1920s, a period when the government and white unions were actively conspiring to legally eradicate Japanese Canadians from the fishing industry altogether. Etsu Suzuki ultimately left Canada in December 1932. While the Camp and Mill Workers Union peaked at a modest membership of around 600 individuals across its eight locals, its legacy was profound. Through the establishment of a Labour union and a dedicated newspaper, Suzuki provided a radical, progressive alternative to isolation, proving that education and inter-racial solidarity could serve as potent weapons against institutionalized racial exclusion.

5. Fishing License Lawsuits (1924–1929)

Summary

When the federal government progressively reduced the number of fishing licenses, Japanese Canadians formed the Fishermen's Liaison Council, collected funds, and sued the government. They ultimately won their right to fish in a 1928 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada and a 1929 ruling of the Privy Council.

Main text

During and immediately after World War I, Japanese Canadian fishermen reached the peak of their influence and success in the British Columbia fishing industry. The high prices and Labour shortages of the wartime period enabled them to enjoy unprecedented earnings, and by 1919, they controlled 3,267 fishing licences, accounting for nearly half of all licences issued in the province that year. However, the post-war economic slump brought thousands of returning white soldiers looking for employment, leading to renewed and intense racial animosity against the highly skilled Japanese. Yielding to political pressure from British Columbia, the federal Department of Marine and Fisheries announced a policy in 1919 designed to "gradually eliminate Orientals from the fishery" by systematically reducing the number of licenses issued to them. Because licenses were only granted to naturalized citizens and native-born Canadians, this policy was explicitly designed to dislodge and impoverish recognized Canadian citizens solely on the basis of their race.

This discriminatory agenda was aggressively accelerated in 1922 with the appointment of the Pacific Coast Fisheries Commission, commonly known as the Duff Commission. Composed largely of

Members of Parliament from British Columbia fishing districts, the Commission conducted a highly biased investigation that invited only white and Indigenous fishermen to express their views, entirely excluding representatives of the Japanese Canadian fishermen. Operating on the assumption that the eradication of Japanese Canadians was already established government policy, the Duff Commission recommended drastic, systematic cuts to licenses held by "other than white British subjects and Indians". They mandated a 40% reduction of Japanese Canadian licenses in 1923, an additional 15% reduction in 1925, and a progressive phase-out intended to completely eliminate all Japanese Canadian fishermen from British Columbia's waters by 1932.

The immediate impact of these arbitrary reductions was devastating to the Japanese Canadian community, as thousands of men were stripped of their livelihoods overnight without a single cent of compensation from the government for their lost investments in boats and gear. To mitigate the widespread hardship, local organizations like the Steveston Fishermen's Benevolent Society desperately raised funds to provide relief payments of \$150 to \$350 to families whose licenses had been revoked. Many of the displaced fishermen were forced to transition into entirely new industries as unskilled Labourers, with groups of former fishermen pooling their resources to buy land and form agricultural cooperatives, such as the Steveston Japanese Farmers Company established in 1923.

Recognizing that the provincial and federal governments were acting in unison to completely eradicate them from the industry, the remaining Japanese Canadian fishermen realized that isolated, regional protests were no longer sufficient. In 1922, Japanese fishermen in the northern Skeena region had established the Second District Fishermen's Association, becoming independent of traditional community leaders. In a historic show of solidarity, this northern group allied with the Steveston Fishermen's Benevolent Association and the fishermen of District 3 (Vancouver Island) to form the Fishermen's Liaison Council. This unified council became the central organizing body dedicated to resisting the federal government's license reduction policies and fighting for the community's fundamental right to survive.

Launching a legal challenge against the federal government required substantial capital, leading to a bitter internal struggle within the Japanese Canadian community over funding. In 1924, the Steveston Fishermen's Association approached the Japanese Association of Canada (JAC) and the Imperial Consul, Suna Gomei, requesting that they release money from a "special account" previously amassed through passport certification fees to pay for the lawsuit. Consul Gomei coldly refused, declaring that a lawsuit against the Canadian government was impossible to win, and the conservative JAC backed his refusal to avoid rocking the political boat. When a more sympathetic consul, Tatsuo Kawaso, took over in 1925 and agreed to authorize the funds, the fishermen made a shocking discovery: the JAC executives had entirely squandered the "special account" on poorly executed demographic surveys without consulting the fishermen. The Fishermen's Liaison Council was thus left completely on its own to finance its legal survival.

Faced with a new parliamentary committee recommendation in 1926 that demanded further annual license reductions of 10% starting in 1927, the Fishermen's Liaison Council made the resolute decision to sue the federal government at its own expense. They retained two prominent lawyers, Jacquelin and Newcomb, to launch a test case in 1927 that would challenge the constitutionality of the federal reductions. While this pivotal test case was *sub judice* (under judicial consideration), the Department of

Marine and Fisheries was legally forced to halt any further reductions of Japanese Canadian fishing licenses.

On May 1, 1928, the Supreme Court of Canada delivered a landmark judgment in favour of the Japanese Canadian fishermen. The Supreme Court ruled that, under the existing legislation, any British subject residing in British Columbia who was not otherwise legally disqualified possessed the absolute right to receive a fishing license, provided they submitted the proper application and tendered the prescribed fee. Because the Japanese Canadian fishermen were naturalized British subjects, the Court determined there was no legal basis for the federal government to systematically strip them of their licenses based on their racial origin.

Unwilling to accept this defeat, the federal government escalated the legal battle by appealing the Supreme Court's decision to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, which served as the highest appellate court in the British Empire. The Fishermen's Liaison Council had no choice but to absorb the astronomical costs of fighting the appeal overseas. Finally, in October 1929, the Privy Council dismissed the Canadian government's appeal entirely. The Privy Council ruled that the Canadian government's targeted proposal to exclude only citizens of Japanese descent from the fishing industry was fundamentally "contrary to justice and humanity," and would be detrimental to both the international credibility of the British Empire and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

This monumental legal victory came at a staggering financial cost to the Japanese Canadian community. The lawsuit ultimately cost the Fishermen's Liaison Council \$40,000. Because the average annual income of a Japanese Canadian fisherman in 1929 was scarcely \$1,082, the legal fees averaged roughly \$200 per person, representing a crushing burden of nearly 20% of a family's yearly income right at the onset of the Great Depression.

Furthermore, the federal government immediately sought a legislative workaround to circumvent the spirit of the court's ruling. While the case was still being appealed to the Privy Council, Ottawa quietly enacted new legislation granting the Minister of Fisheries "absolute discretion" to issue or withhold fishing leases and licenses, bypassing the Supreme Court's determination that the minister previously lacked such discretionary power. Despite this bad-faith political maneuvering, the Fishermen's Liaison Council's arduous legal battle achieved its primary, existential goal: it successfully halted the systematic, scheduled eradication of Japanese Canadians from the British Columbia fishing industry. According to the original federal plan dictated by the 1922 Duff Commission, there should have been zero Japanese Canadian fishermen left on the water by 1932. Instead, as a direct result of their organized resistance, incredible financial sacrifice, and ultimate legal triumph, 1,998 Japanese Canadian fishermen retained their licenses and successfully defended their right to survive in 1932.

6. The Franchise Delegation of the Japanese Canadian Citizens League (1936)

Summary

The Japanese Canadian Citizens League (JCCL) sent a four-member delegation of Nisei to Ottawa to testify before a Special Committee, actively demanding the revision of election laws to grant them voting rights.

Main text

By the 1930s, the Japanese Canadian community was undergoing a profound demographic and cultural shift as the second generation, known as the Nisei, began coming of age. Numbering over 10,000 by 1931, these Canadian-born youth were entirely different from their immigrant parents. Educated in the Canadian public school system, the Nisei had been heavily exposed to Anglo-Canadian acculturating influences and fervently believed in representative government and democratic ideals. However, despite their complete Canadianization, they were systematically denied the fundamental rights of citizenship, including the provincial and federal franchise, solely on the basis of their race. Realizing that they could not rely on the immigrant generation (the Issei) to press effectively for legal and economic equality, the Nisei organized the Japanese Canadian Citizens League (JCCL) in the spring of 1936. **The JCCL was established to provide a unified, collective front independent of traditional Issei control, with the ultimate goal of securing full citizenship rights and integrating the Nisei as an integral part of Canada.**

The immediate catalyst for the JCCL's first major political action was a February 1936 debate in the House of Commons. Angus MacInnis, a CCF Member of Parliament, had introduced a motion to extend the franchise to Asians born and living in Canada, but it was overwhelmingly defeated by a vote of 186 to 15. Prime Minister Mackenzie King justified the defeat by claiming he "was not aware that either the Orientals themselves or the public generally were advocating votes for Orientals". In response to this dismissal, the JCCL decided to demand the revision of election laws by sending a delegation to Ottawa to testify before the Special Committee on Elections and Franchise Acts. The mobilization for this mission was a grassroots community effort fueled by the sacrifices of the younger generation. As one delegate later noted, the trip was made possible by hundreds of young boys and girls contributing their quarters and fifty-cent pieces, sacrificing movies and ice-cream sodas to fund the political fight.

To formally present their case, the JCCL retained Vancouver lawyer T.G. Norris, who prepared an uncompromising 62-page brief. **Norris's brief attacked the racial disqualification as a "weapon of industrial expediency and an instrument of race oppression," warning that depriving the Nisei of the franchise would prevent assimilation and create a permanently oppressed economic minority.** In a striking comparison, the brief likened Canada's refusal of the franchise to Hitler's policies against the Jews, asking if enlightened Canada truly wanted a "blood purge" and warning that the irrational course would ultimately cost Canada dearly.

The JCCL's bold political maneuvering was not universally supported within the Japanese Canadian enclave, exposing a widening cultural and generational gap between the Canadian-born youth and their immigrant parents. The Canadian Japanese Association (CJA), the powerful, Issei-dominated organization that traditionally acted as the community's primary voice, strongly opposed the Nisei delegation. The CJA resented the JCCL's challenge to its established authority, underscoring a fundamental cleavage between the two generations over the "proper" methods for seeking change and redress of grievances within a hostile white society.

Undeterred by internal opposition, the JCCL selected four highly educated and articulate delegates to travel to Ottawa: Hideko Hyodo, a schoolteacher; Minoru Kobayashi, an insurance agent; Edward Banno, a dentist; and S.I. Hayakawa, a university lecturer. When the four delegates appeared before the 12-member, all-party Commons committee on May 22, 1936, they immediately confounded the expectations of the eastern politicians. So ignorant were the parliamentarians of the realities of the

Canadian-born Nisei that the committee chairman, Bothwell, had previously inquired if the delegates would require interpreters. **Upon hearing them speak, Conservative MP John Ritchie MacNicol expressed his surprise, explicitly congratulating the delegation on their "splendid command of the English language".** This interaction perfectly illustrated how easily Canadians had been deceived by the dark myths and stereotypes spun by anti-Japanese politicians regarding the supposed "inassimilability" of the Oriental population.

During the hearing, the four Nisei delegates stressed their adaptability, their "extraordinarily complete process of Canadianization," and their undeniable fitness to exercise the franchise. Hayakawa, who was a Vancouver-born Nisei studying and teaching at the University of Wisconsin, spoke passionately to the committee. He assured the politicians that the delegates were not merely an exceptional, isolated group, but the articulate representatives of thousands of Canadian citizens who desperately wanted to belong to their country. He movingly quoted a Japanese Canadian parent who had told him that "he could die in peace if his children could have the franchise which he had been denied".

The compelling presentation by the Nisei delegation was met with a vicious counterattack from British Columbia's political establishment. In subsequent committee meetings, traditional anti-Japanese MPs A.W. Neill and Thomas Reid appeared to present counterevidence and vigorously discredit the JCCL delegates. Neill told the committee that the "charming lady and the polished gentlemen" did not represent the bulk of the Oriental population seeking votes. Reid presented a brief asserting that there was no difference between Canadian-born Japanese and those in Japan, alleging that the entire franchise agitation was a conspiracy fostered by the Japanese Imperial Government and its consul. **Neill viciously dismissed the Nisei's plea for justice as "legal quibbling," "sob stuff," and "claptrap".** He warned the committee that granting the federal franchise would be the "thin edge of the wedge," inevitably leading to Japanese political and economic control over the province of British Columbia. In his desperate attempt to instill fear, Neill wildly exaggerated the demographic reality, warning of 25,000 Japanese rushing the polls, even though fewer than 5,400 would have been eligible to vote.

The outcome of the 1936 hearings was a predictable and disheartening defeat for the Nisei. Because the right to vote in federal elections was legally tethered to provincial electoral lists, Parliament would have needed to take extraordinary constitutional action to override British Columbia's discriminatory legislation. Both major political parties remained irrevocably opposed to any extension of the federal franchise to Asians, and Parliament chose to do nothing to rectify the injustice. Despite the failure to secure the vote, the 1936 delegation to Ottawa stood as a monumental turning point in Japanese Canadian history. **It marked the political coming-of-age of the Nisei generation, proving their capacity to independently organize, articulate their democratic rights, and challenge institutional racism on a national stage.** The frustrating realization that justice could not be attained in British Columbia also catalyzed the "Great Adventure" of Nisei migration, inspiring ambitious youth to eventually move east of the Rockies to places like Toronto to seek the equality that their home province so relentlessly denied them.

II. During World War II

1. The Nisei Mass Evacuation Group (NMEG) (1942)

Summary

Rejecting the government's orders to separate adult men from their families and send them to road camps, the NMEG launched a campaign of civil disobedience. They issued public ultimatums, hid from the RCMP, and evaded curfew by wearing stolen "Chinese Canadian" identification badges to organize at night. Hundreds defied the road camp orders and willingly chose to be incarcerated in Prisoner of War (POW) camps like Angler and Petawawa as an instrument of protest, successfully forcing the government to eventually allow family reunification in detention camps.

Main text

The campaign of civil disobedience launched by the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group (NMEG) in 1942 stands as one of the most remarkable, yet often overlooked, episodes of Japanese Canadian resistance during the wartime uprooting. When the federal government ordered the separation of adult men from their families for assignment to isolated road camps in the interior of British Columbia, the NMEG rejected the directive outright. Their refusal was not impulsive but grounded in a principled belief that the forced breakup of families violated both Canadian democratic ideals and the basic dignity owed to citizens and residents alike. The government's policy, framed as a wartime necessity, was experienced by Japanese Canadians as an assault on the core of family life. In response, the NMEG organized a coordinated movement of non-violent resistance that challenged the state's authority and exposed the contradictions in its professed commitment to fairness and justice.

The NMEG's strategy combined public protest, clandestine organizing, and symbolic acts of defiance. They issued public ultimatums to federal authorities, demanding that families be allowed to remain together during the evacuation. These ultimatums were not empty gestures; they were carefully crafted statements that appealed to Canadian values, invoked constitutional rights, and highlighted the moral inconsistency of a government that claimed to fight fascism abroad while imposing discriminatory policies at home. When these appeals were ignored, the NMEG escalated their resistance. Members hid from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), refusing to report for road camp assignments. This act alone carried significant risk, as evading federal orders could result in arrest, imprisonment, or worse. Yet the NMEG persisted, believing that compliance would legitimize a policy they viewed as fundamentally unjust.

One of the most striking aspects of their resistance was the ingenuity with which they circumvented the curfew imposed on all persons of Japanese origin. To continue organizing after dark, NMEG members wore stolen identification badges designated for "Chinese Canadians," exploiting the racialized policing practices of the time. Because authorities relied heavily on visual markers and identification tags to distinguish between ethnic groups, these badges allowed NMEG organizers to move through the city at night without attracting suspicion. This tactic was both practical and symbolic: it exposed the absurdity of racial classification systems and demonstrated the lengths to which Japanese Canadians were forced to go simply to exercise basic freedoms of movement and association.

As the government intensified its efforts to enforce compliance, hundreds of NMEG supporters made a dramatic and unprecedented choice. Rather than submit to the road camp orders, they willingly accepted incarceration in Prisoner of War (POW) camps such as Angler in Ontario and Petawawa in northern Ontario. These facilities were designed to hold enemy combatants and political prisoners, not civilians who had committed no crime. Yet the NMEG transformed imprisonment into a tool of protest. By choosing confinement over compliance, they forced the government into a moral and political

dilemma. If the state insisted that Japanese Canadians were loyal subjects unfit for combat service, how could it justify placing them in POW camps? Conversely, if it claimed they were dangerous, how could it defend the earlier assertion that the uprooting was merely a precautionary measure? The NMEG's actions exposed these contradictions with stark clarity.

Life in the POW camps was harsh. Prisoners endured extreme cold, isolation, and the psychological strain of indefinite detention. Yet many NMEG members later recalled that their time in Angler or Petawawa was marked by a sense of solidarity and purpose. They viewed their incarceration as a collective stand against injustice, a sacrifice made to protect the integrity of their families and community. Their resistance also challenged the stereotype of Japanese Canadians as passive or compliant. Instead, it revealed a community capable of organized, principled, and courageous opposition to discriminatory state power.

The government, initially confident that its policies would be implemented without significant resistance, soon found itself facing a crisis of legitimacy. The refusal of hundreds of men to enter road camps disrupted the British Columbia Security Commission's logistical plans and drew unwanted attention to the coercive nature of the evacuation. The NMEG's public statements, circulated widely within the community and occasionally reported in sympathetic newspapers, framed the issue not as a matter of wartime security but as a question of civil rights. Their insistence on family unity resonated deeply with many Canadians who, despite prevailing racial prejudices, recognized the injustice of separating husbands from wives and fathers from children.

Ultimately, the government was forced to modify its policy. Faced with mounting resistance, administrative delays, and the political embarrassment of incarcerating loyal civilians in POW camps, federal authorities eventually permitted family reunification within detention camps in the interior. This concession did not undo the broader injustices of the uprooting, nor did it signal a shift toward equitable treatment. However, it represented a significant victory for the NMEG and demonstrated that organized civil disobedience could influence federal policy even in a time of national crisis. The decision allowed thousands of families to remain together during the difficult years that followed, mitigating—though not eliminating—the trauma of displacement.

The NMEG's campaign of civil disobedience occupies a unique place in the history of Japanese Canadians. It challenges the narrative that the community responded to wartime policies with quiet acceptance. Instead, it reveals a sophisticated and morally grounded resistance movement that combined public advocacy, strategic non-compliance, and personal sacrifice. Their actions anticipated later civil rights movements and laid the foundation for postwar redress efforts. By asserting their rights as Canadians and refusing to accept policies that violated their dignity, the NMEG demonstrated that even marginalized communities possess agency and the capacity to challenge unjust authority.

In retrospect, the NMEG's resistance underscores the importance of civil liberties, especially during periods of national fear and uncertainty. Their story serves as a reminder that democratic principles must be defended not only by governments but also by ordinary citizens willing to take risks in the name of justice. The legacy of the NMEG is not merely one of protest but of resilience, solidarity, and an unwavering commitment to preserving family and community in the face of state-imposed adversity.

2. Immigration Shed Disturbance (May 1942)

Summary

Detainees held in the Vancouver Immigration Building barricaded themselves on the third floor, breaking windows, hurling rubbish, and flushing water from a fire hose onto their guards to protest visitor restrictions.

Main text

In the spring of 1942, following the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Canadian federal government initiated the forced uprooting of over 20,000 Japanese Canadians from the protected coastal areas of British Columbia. The initial strategy implemented by the government dictated that adult male Japanese Canadians be separated from their families and sent to isolated road construction camps in the British Columbia interior and Ontario. This policy of forced family separation caused profound distress and outrage within the Japanese Canadian community, as women and children were abandoned to the chaotic conditions of the Hastings Park assembly center while their primary breadwinners were shipped away. The impending separations prompted a militant resistance movement among the Canadian-born second generation, or Nisei, which ultimately culminated in a violent standoff at the Vancouver Immigration Building on May 13, 1942.

The men sent to the road camps faced dismal prospects that fueled the wider resistance. In addition to the psychological trauma of imprisonment and separation, inmates were plagued by fears of impoverishment. While the going rate for general Labour in the British Columbia interior was sixty cents an hour, the government paid the Japanese Canadian inmates a meagre wage of twenty-five to thirty-five cents an hour. From this wage, twenty-two dollars and fifty cents per month was deducted for board, alongside an additional twenty dollars for family support. Consequently, a married man working eight hours a day could net as little as seven dollars and fifty cents a month. Recognizing that this scheme was unjust and destructive to the community's survival, young Nisei dissidents broke away from the more compliant Japanese Canadian Citizens Council and formed the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group (NMEG).

Led by figures such as Fujikazu Tanaka and Robert Y. Shimoda, the NMEG actively rejected the government's mandate. In an open letter to the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) on April 15, 1942, they declared a firm "NO" to the orders calling for the break-up of their families. They argued that the forced separation of husbands from their wives and children contributed nothing to the Canadian war effort and was a totally unnecessary revocation of basic human rights. To enforce their demands, over 140 Nisei defied their road camp orders and went underground. They slept in vacant buildings, hid with relatives, and moved about at night wearing stolen "I am a Chinese" identification badges to evade the strict dusk-to-dawn curfew imposed by authorities.

Rather than submit to the road camps, many of these young men concluded that there was nothing to lose by actively defying the orders. They viewed voluntary internment as a form of noble self-sacrifice and a positive, active way of demonstrating their anger against the government's inhuman policies. This wave of voluntary internment escalated significantly on April 25, 1942, when 66 young men from

Steveston and Vancouver arrived at the Vancouver Immigration Shed and demanded to be interned. Bolstered by the cheers of 800 supporters, four spokesmen forced their way into the building after BCSC Chairman Austin Taylor initially refused their demand. They easily accomplished this once they realized the guards' guns were empty. Ultimately, RCMP Assistant Commissioner Frederick J. Mead was called in and granted their demand for detention. By May 13, ninety-six of these protesters had already been shipped to the Prisoner of War (POW) camp at Petawawa, Ontario, while another 106 dissidents were awaiting shipment inside the Immigration Shed.

The atmosphere inside the Immigration Building was highly tense, as 130 men were detained together on the third floor awaiting their fate. The specific catalyst for the infamous May 13 riot was a newly issued order prohibiting the families and friends of the inmates from approaching the building to talk to them or to pass them food. Unhappy with this latest restriction that severed their last physical connection to their loved ones, the inmates became increasingly restive. They demanded the opportunity to express their views to a higher authority.

At 1:30 P.M. on May 13, the officer of the guard arrived to address the situation. The inmates immediately presented him with a letter formally demanding that the government carry out the removal in family units and rescind the restrictions on their visitors. Frustrated by their confinement and the authorities' rigid stance, the inmates quickly escalated their protest from a written petition to physical destruction. Some of the inmates turned a fire hose on a sentry and proceeded to violently wreck the room in which they were being kept. During this noisy demonstration, the men broke windows, hurled toilet paper and rubbish out of the building down to the ground below and successfully broke down the wall separating their room from the adjoining one where the rest of the inmates were being held. This dramatic act of defiance finally achieved the NMEG's secondary goal: catching the attention of the Vancouver press, which had previously refused to publish the dissidents' open letters.

The authorities responded to the escalating riot with a heavy show of military force. At 4:00 P.M., Brigadier D.R. Sargent, the Officer-in-Command of the Vancouver defences, arrived at the Immigration Shed and offered to receive a delegation of the protesting inmates. The defiant detainees flatly rejected his offer, insisting that the Brigadier should come to them instead. Faced with this insubordination, authorities brought eighty men from the First Irish Fusiliers into the Immigration Shed and issued them police batons to assert control over the facility.

The military standoff dragged into the early evening. At 6:00 P.M., the inmates were ordered to clean up the shattered glass and debris they had strewn across the third floor. When the inmates staunchly refused to comply, Brigadier Sargent retaliated by ordering that no evening meal be served to the detainees. This punitive action only precipitated further property damage by the outraged inmates, ultimately prompting the military to deploy tear gas to forcefully subdue the riot. The soldiers were finally dismissed from the scene at 9:00 P.M.

While the riot unfolded inside, a group of sympathizers carrying a Japanese flag attempted to enter the premises from the outside but was gently turned back by authorities. In the aftermath of the disturbance, strict warnings were issued to keep all visitors off the premises, and soldiers were permanently posted to guard the approaches to the building. In a frantic effort to control public perception and minimize the political fallout, BCSC Chairman Austin Taylor actively downplayed the severity of the riot to the press, characterizing the incident as "more playful than anything else."

Ultimately, the May 13 riot at the Vancouver Immigration Building stood as a powerful manifestation of the Japanese Canadian resistance to discriminatory wartime policies. Following the disturbance and subsequent evasions, the resisters were transferred to high-security POW camps in Ontario, such as Petawawa and Angler, where they were detained alongside Axis combatants. Yet, their willing self-sacrifice and militant protests proved highly effective in the long run. The organized resistance of the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group effectively paralyzed the government's road camp program through passive resistance, strikes, and outright defiance. Realizing that the men would not act as a willing workforce while separated from their families, the federal government was forced to capitulate. Following negotiations with NMEG leaders Shigeichi Uchibori and Etsuji Yoshida on June 30, 1942, authorities officially agreed to halt family separation and allow families to relocate together in the detention camps of the British Columbia interior, validating the immense sacrifices made by the protesters at the Immigration Building.

3. Road Camp Strikes (June 1942)

Summary

Japanese Canadian men assigned to isolated road camps (such as Gosnell, B.C., and Geikie and Decoigne, Alberta) staged wildcat strikes, dropped their tools, and refused to work. They demanded to be reunited with their families and protested delayed wages, rendering the camps effectively paralyzed.

Main text

In the spring of 1942, as part of the Canadian federal government's policy to forcibly uproot over 20,000 Japanese Canadians from the Pacific Coast, a systematic plan was implemented to separate adult males from their families. The British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) ordered men between the ages of 18 and 45 to leave their wives and children behind and report to isolated road construction camps in the British Columbia interior and the Rocky Mountains, such as those along the Hope-Princeton, Revelstoke-Sicamous, and Yellowhead highway projects. The government viewed this "partial evacuation" as an ideal way to quickly remove supposedly dangerous males from the coast while utilizing them as cheap Labour for badly needed transcontinental highway links. However, this policy of forced family separation provoked profound distress and ultimately sparked a wave of militant resistance. The men assigned to these remote locations—such as the camps at Gosnell in British Columbia, and Geikie and Decoigne in Alberta—eventually staged coordinated wildcat strikes, dropped their tools, and refused to work, effectively paralyzing the government's road-building program.

The environment within these isolated road camps bred immediate resentment. While the physical settings of the camps were generally healthy, they were profoundly unhealthy in a psychological and emotional sense. The government officially claimed that the Japanese Canadians were merely Labourers and not prisoners of war, but the inmates knew otherwise. They had been transported under the guard of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and were legally prohibited from leaving the camp premises. **This prison-like atmosphere was constantly reinforced by the presence of four armed RCMP special constables stationed at each camp.** Ostensibly there to guard the nearby railway tracks, the guards were perceived by both the inmates and the public as wardens keeping watch over potential saboteurs. Isolated in the wilderness, plagued by sub-zero temperatures, and subjected

to menial tasks with inadequate manual tools like pickaxes and shovels, the men grew increasingly restive and bitter.

Compounding the humiliation of imprisonment was the severe economic exploitation the men faced. Fear of impoverishment was a constant source of anxiety, directly resulting from the meager wages dictated by the federal government. While the standard going rate for general Labour in the British Columbia interior at the time was 60 cents per hour, the government paid the Japanese Canadian inmates only 25 to 35 cents an hour, reasoning that "enemy aliens" should not earn more than the lowest-ranking soldier in the Canadian army. From a theoretical monthly wage of \$50, the government deducted \$22.50 for room and board, and for married men, an additional \$20 was automatically deducted for family support. Consequently, **a married man working eight hours a day for twenty-five days a month would net a paltry \$7.50**. Furthermore, this meager compensation was often delayed, creating immense frustration among Labourers who felt they were being reduced to indigents.

The most agonizing grievance, however, was the forced separation from their families. Many men had been abruptly torn from their homes, leaving their wives and children abandoned in the chaotic, unsanitary confines of the Hastings Park assembly center in Vancouver, or isolated in coastal villages with no visible means of support. Isolated from accurate news, the road camp Labourers were bombarded by dark rumors regarding the miserable conditions their families were enduring. The mental duress of this separation made the men completely unwilling to cooperate. Kinzie Tanaka, a Nisei inmate and former community leader assigned to one of the camps, eloquently explained the psychological reality to the BCSC: **"You cannot forcibly separate a man from his family and expect him to be a willing worker. When these men are separated from their families they cannot help but worry about them, it would not be human otherwise"**. Tanaka pointed out that Japanese Canadians who were sent to the grueling sugar beet fields worked diligently simply because their families were kept together.

Stripped of their dignity, impoverished, and deeply worried about their dependents, the men became ideal targets for organized resistance by mid-1942. Troublemakers and ideological resisters—sometimes referred to as the *Gambariya* (the Resolute Ones)—began agitating within the camps, capitalizing on the widespread low morale. The men's frustration initially manifested as severe slowdowns; in the camps near Revelstoke, men were averaging only two to four hours of actual work per day. **This passive resistance rapidly escalated into open rebellion. In mid-June 1942, major wildcat strikes erupted at the road camps in Geikie and Decoigne (Descoigne), Alberta, and Gosnell, British Columbia.** The men simply dropped their tools and outright refused to work. At the Yard Creek camp, the protests even resulted in a direct clash with a camp timekeeper. These coordinated strikes completely paralyzed the road construction projects, leaving the Department of Mines and Resources personnel who ran the camps helpless, unable to discharge the workers and equally unable to meet their demands.

The Canadian authorities attempted to crush the rebellion using intimidation. The RCMP, initially dismissing the outbreaks as "minor," swept into the striking camps and arrested 29 so-called "ringleaders". These men were shipped under armed guard to the immigration detention sheds in Vancouver, and subsequently incarcerated in high-security Prisoner of War (POW) camps like Angler and Petawawa in Ontario. However, the government quickly discovered that the threat of internment was entirely ineffective as a deterrent. **The road camp inmates soon realized that the prisoner of war**

rates paid in the internment camps actually allowed them to net more income per month than the exploitative wages of the road camps. Furthermore, group pressure and a strong sense of common identity maintained absolute solidarity among the striking workers. When BCSC Chairman Austin Taylor demanded an explanation for the resistance, one inmate bluntly told him that the men supported the troublemakers "for the simple reason that they are all in the same boat and therefore consider it necessary to stick together".

The total paralysis of the camps forced a reckoning within the federal government. By late May and June of 1942, it became painfully evident to BCSC officials that the road camp program was doomed to fail unless the men were given the hope of rejoining their families. RCMP Commissioner S.T. Wood advised the Justice Minister that the unrest would only increase, urging that families be reunited as soon as possible. Realizing that they could not break the collective resolve of the Japanese Canadian Labourers, Assistant Commissioner F.J. Mead and BCSC medical supervisor Dr. Lyall Hodgins traveled to Ottawa in mid-June to personally convince the federal government to abandon the separation policy. Mead warned that the Gosnell strike was merely **"a forerunner of more of the same kind of trouble if we do not commence to keep these families united"**.

Faced with this unyielding civil disobedience, the Department of Labour finally capitulated. The government scrubbed its plans to keep the men indefinitely isolated and authorized the construction of shack camps in the Slocan Valley and near Hope, B.C., where families could be interned together. The most inefficient of the strike-plagued road camps were ordered closed, and the married men were transferred to the interior to build the very detention camps that would house their reunited families. Through their resolute refusal to work, dropping of tools, and unified wildcat strikes at camps like Gosnell, Geikie, and Decoigne, these Japanese Canadian men successfully defeated one of the government's cruelest policies, proving that they would not be utilized as docile slave Labour at the expense of their families' integrity.

4. The *Gambariya* (The Resolute Ones)

Summary

A faction of ideological resisters actively rebelled against camp administrations. They boycotted mandatory registrations, opposed Japanese Canadian leaders who advocated cooperation, and used non-cooperation to disrupt authorities.

Main text

In early 1942, the Canadian government enacted a sweeping and racially discriminatory policy forcibly uprooting over 22,000 Japanese Canadians from the Pacific Coast, stripping them of their homes, businesses, and civil liberties. Amidst the chaos of this forced relocation and internment, a fierce faction of ideological resisters emerged, known historically as the *Gambariya* (The Resolute Ones)—sometimes phonetically referred to as the "Bambaria". This faction fundamentally rejected the stereotype of Japanese Canadian passivity and docility. The *Gambariya* engaged in a distinct manifestation of Japanese determination, rooted in the cultural concept of *ganbaru*—to persist in or sustain a struggle against overwhelming odds. Composed largely of nationalist *Issei* (first-generation immigrants) and deeply disillusioned *Nisei* (second-generation, Canadian-born youth), the *Gambariya* operated as an uncompromising resistance movement. They fiercely opposed the Canadian authorities,

boycotted mandatory registrations, and utilized systemic non-cooperation to disrupt camp administration, determined to preserve their political and cultural dignity at all costs.

The roots of the *Gambariya* resistance were embedded in the profound psychological and economic traumas inflicted by the federal government's policies. Initially, many Japanese Canadians had hoped that the government would treat them with the fairness promised by democratic ideals. However, the state's decision to separate adult men from their wives and children, forcing them into isolated road construction camps in the British Columbia interior and the Rocky Mountains, sparked widespread outrage. In these road camps, men were subjected to grueling manual Labour in sub-zero temperatures with inadequate tools, earning a meager 25 to 35 cents an hour, from which exorbitant room and board fees were deducted. Furthermore, the government's subsequent decision to systematically confiscate and liquidate Japanese Canadian properties, businesses, and personal belongings under the Custodian of Enemy Property obliterated any remaining trust. Stripped of their dignity and financially ruined, these frustrated, pessimistic, and demoralized men formed the core of the *Gambariya*, ready to vent their feelings through open rebellion.

Ideologically, the *Gambariya* were driven by a complex mixture of justifiable anger and, for some, a fervent pro-Japan nationalism. Among the *Issei* and the *Kibei* (Canadian-born Nisei who had received their education in Japan), there was a strong contingent who firmly believed that Japan would inevitably defeat the Allied forces. Relying on shortwave radio broadcasts secretly maintained within the camps, these individuals formed highly unrealistic ideas about the war's progress, dismissing the victories reported in the Canadian press as mere propaganda. Bolstered by their belief in an imminent Japanese victory, these patriots viewed their resistance and internment as a badge of honor and a noble self-sacrifice. For these ideological hardliners, any form of compliance with the Canadian government was viewed as traitorous to their heritage, and they firmly believed they would be rewarded for their suffering once Japan emerged victorious.

The tactics employed by the *Gambariya* centered on absolute non-cooperation and the deliberate paralysis of government operations. In the isolated road camps at Geikie and Decoigne in Alberta, and Gosnell in British Columbia, these ideological resisters preyed on the fears of their fellow inmates and successfully disrupted the camp routines. By mid-June 1942, this passive resistance escalated into overt wildcat strikes and severe work slowdowns. The men simply dropped their tools and completely refused to work, effectively paralyzing the road construction projects. The Department of Mines and Resources personnel running the camps were left entirely helpless, as they were unable to discharge the workers and equally unable to meet their demands for family reunification and fair wages.

Beyond disrupting the Canadian authorities, the *Gambariya* aggressively targeted fellow Japanese Canadians who advocated for compliance or assisted the camp administrations. In the highly pressurized and closed societies of the internment camps, anyone who cooperated with the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) or the Custodian of Enemy Property was immediately branded as an *inu* (dog or informer) and treated as a collabourator. Nisei who took on even basic clerical jobs in the administration offices were distrusted, ostracized, and subjected to severe social pressure. The *Gambariya* also utilized intimidation and physical threats; those who dared to claim that Japan would lose the war were threatened with beatings and derisively called *atama no kuroi keto* ("black-haired

white trash"). This internal policing ensured that moderate voices were frequently silenced through fear of retaliation.

The *Gambariya* also fiercely opposed the established Japanese Canadian leadership, particularly old-guard *Issei* figures like Etsuji Morii. Morii, a powerful padrone with ties to Vancouver's underworld, had been appointed by the BCSC to chair the "Japanese War Security Committee". Morii's approach was purely transactional; he used his influence, intimidation, and closed-door dealings to enforce total compliance with the government's uprooting orders. The *Gambariya* and other resisters wholly rejected Morii's authority, viewing his collaborative control and authoritarian tactics as a complete betrayal of the community's dignity. They refused to be herded into submission by a self-appointed dictator who was acting as an intermediary for the very government that had destroyed their livelihoods.

Equally intense was the *Gambariya*'s ideological war with Tom Shoyama, the highly educated *Nisei* editor of *The New Canadian* newspaper. Shoyama advocated a strict philosophy of "law-abiding cooperation". He argued that by complying peacefully, the *Nisei* would definitively prove their absolute loyalty to Canada and secure their constitutional rights for the post-war era. Shoyama used his weekly columns to aggressively push back against the *Gambariya*, warning that their overt non-cooperation and wildcat strikes were dangerous. He believed the *Gambariya*'s actions provided anti-Asian politicians with the exact ammunition they needed to label all Japanese Canadians as subversive "fifth columnists" and justify permanent disenfranchisement. In turn, the *Gambariya* despised Shoyama's approach, viewing his peaceful compliance model as a naive, cowardly submission to a racist state that had already proven it had no intention of respecting their civil rights.

The Canadian government's response to the *Gambariya*'s rebellion was swift and punitive. Recognizing that the strikes in the road camps were threatening the entire forced Labour program, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) swept into the camps to arrest the ringleaders. Authorities rounded up the protesting men, initially holding them in the immigration detention sheds in Vancouver. When the men continued to refuse to obey the BCSC's orders, the government escalated the punishment, ultimately shipping over 700 resisters eastward under armed guard. They were incarcerated in high-security Prisoner of War (POW) camps located in Petawawa and Angler, Ontario, where they were detained behind barbed wire alongside German combat prisoners. For many of the *Gambariya*, however, this internment was not a deterrent but a validation of their resolute struggle.

The spirit of *ganbaru* sustained by these ideological resisters did not evaporate with the end of the war; it persisted through the government's post-war attempts to deport or disperse them. The federal government issued a cruel ultimatum, forcing Japanese Canadians to either "repatriate" to Japan or relocate east of the Rocky Mountains. The hard-core remnant of the internment camp resisters continued their defiance against these mandates. This culminated in prolonged *ganbari* standoffs, most notably the Moose Jaw Incident from 1946 to 1948. In Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, a group of "diehard ex-internees" refused eviction notices, rejected forced employment, and staged sit-down strikes in sub-zero temperatures to demand justice and compensation for their stolen properties, holding government officials at bay for over two years.

In retrospect, the *Gambariya* represent a crucial and often overlooked chapter in Japanese Canadian history. While their hardline, sometimes fiercely nationalist tactics deeply alienated moderate elements of the community and provoked severe retaliation from the Canadian state, their rebellion shattered the

enduring myth that Japanese Canadians were universally docile victims who meekly accepted their unjust incarceration. By boycotting registrations, organizing strikes, and relentlessly disrupting the camp administrations, the *Gambariya* asserted their agency in the face of absolute state tyranny. Their unyielding non-cooperation remains a profound testament to their determination to survive the indignities of exile on their own terms, preserving their political and cultural integrity through an era of profound darkness.

5. Petawawa POW Camp Incident (July 1942)

Summary

Inmates at the Petawawa camp marched out of their barracks in the early morning to discipline another inmate they perceived as collaborating with the camp commandant. Guards fired warning shots through the walls and beds of the barracks in response to the disturbance, leading the inmates to ignore roll call three times in protest.

Main text

The forced uprooting of Japanese Canadians from the Pacific Coast in 1942 was a traumatic event that sparked profound unrest, giving rise to militant resistance movements such as the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group (NMEG). When the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) ordered all adult male Japanese Canadians between the ages of 18 and 45 to abandon their families and report to isolated road construction camps, the NMEG organized a campaign of civil disobedience. Led by Canadian-born *Nisei*, the group declared that while they were willing to cooperate with the government's relocation, they absolutely refused to be separated from their wives and children. To crush this open defiance, Canadian authorities rounded up the resisters, initially holding them in the Vancouver Immigration Shed before escalating their punishment. Rather than submitting to the road camps, hundreds of these young men were shipped across the country and incarcerated in maximum-security Prisoner of War (POW) camps in Ontario, an action that set the stage for the infamous Petawawa POW camp incident in July 1942.

The men transferred to the Petawawa camp, located near the border of Ontario and Quebec, found themselves thrust into a rigid and hostile military environment. Escorted by armed guards and armored cars, the newly arrived Japanese Canadians were stripped of their clothing for a physical examination and subjected to thorough luggage inspections before being registered. They were locked into old, dilapidated buildings with a capacity of 58 inmates each, secured from the outside with heavy padlocks. The Petawawa camp was an active POW facility housing German and Italian combat prisoners. On the very evening the Japanese Canadians arrived, Italian POWs staged a heroic procession toward their huts, playing instruments and shouting "Roberto"—an acronym combining Rome, Berlin, and Tokyo to reference the Axis Tripartite Pact—until camp guards forced them to disperse.

Life inside Petawawa was governed by a strict, unyielding military schedule. The internees' days were dictated by rigid regulations: reveille at 6:30 A.M., morning muster parades, assigned work parties, sick parades, compound inspections, and evening lock-up and roll call before lights out at 11:00 P.M.. Within the closed, pressurized world of the internment camp, the men in each hut became surrogate families, sharing meals, work, and recreational activities like judo and woodworking. However, this extreme closeness also bred an atmosphere of intense social pressure, demanding strict conformity to the

opinions of the majority or the most vocal inmates. The camp was deeply divided. For pro-Japan patriots and militant NMEG members, imprisonment was viewed as a badge of honor and a noble protest against a racist Canadian state. If an inmate was assigned to a hut dominated by bitter resisters, he faced immense pressure to maintain solidarity and resist any cooperation with the Canadian government.

This volatile environment reached a boiling point over the actions of a fellow inmate, Dr. Hori. Within the highly polarized camp, Dr. Hori was perceived by the militant *Nisei* resisters as a collaborator who was toadying up to the camp commandant. Dr. Hori actively tried to cooperate with the Canadian authorities and frequently spoke to the younger inmates, urging them to leave the POW camp and take up employment in Ontario to help alleviate the severe wartime manpower shortages. To the hardcore members of the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group, whose entire political strategy was based on uncompromising civil disobedience to force the government to reunite their families, Dr. Hori's actions were viewed as a direct betrayal. They firmly believed that he was actively trying to work against them and undermine their collective strike.

The underlying tensions finally erupted into violence on the night of July 1, 1942. In the early hours of the morning, *Nisei* inmates residing in Hut 10 decided to take matters into their own hands to discipline Dr. Hori. Breaking the camp's strict nighttime curfew, a group of NMEG supporters slipped out of their barracks and marched toward his hut. According to one of the participants, the group did not intend to inflict physical harm on the doctor; rather, their goal was to forcefully "persuade" him to stop working against their resistance movement. However, the unauthorized movement of a group of men through the dark camp immediately triggered a military response from the sentries on duty.

The camp guards, observing the nighttime disturbance, assumed that the inmates were attempting a prison break or initiating a riot. Without issuing any verbal warnings to halt, the sentries opened fire on the *Nisei* internees as they moved in the space between Hut 10 and Hut 11. The guards fired three consecutive volleys aimed just above the heads of the marching men. The lethal force of the military response was shockingly real; bullets tore completely through the thin exterior walls of Hut 10. Inside the barracks, the gunfire grazed the blankets of one bed and pierced straight through the pillow of another. It was a miraculous stroke of luck that the two men who normally slept in those specific bunks were among the protesters outside the hut at the time, preventing a fatal tragedy. As one participant later reflected, it was a sheer wonder that nobody was killed during the barrage.

The unprovoked shooting left the Japanese Canadian inmates deeply shocked and furious. Outraged by the excessive zeal and lethal force utilized by the sentries, the inmates immediately filed formal complaints with both the camp commandant and the Spanish Consul, who acted as the protecting power for Japanese nationals in Canada under the Geneva Convention. To reinforce their anger and demonstrate their unified defiance against the camp administration, the internees initiated a camp-wide strike, adamantly refusing to participate in the mandatory military roll call for three consecutive days.

Despite the severity of the shooting, Canadian authorities offered no official explanation for the incident at the time, although a formal inquiry was eventually conducted three months later. The root cause of the near-fatal misunderstanding lay in the abnormal and legally ambiguous status of the Japanese Canadian internees. The military guards stationed at Petawawa were completely ignorant of the fact that

the Japanese men they were guarding were actually civilian Canadian citizens who had been detained for protesting government policies. Assuming their prisoners were Axis combatants, the guards reacted exactly as they had been militarily trained to do when facing an apparent escape attempt by enemy soldiers.

The severe implications of housing Canadian citizens in a combat POW facility under trigger-happy guards forced the government to quickly alter its containment strategy. Shortly after the shooting incident, the Japanese Canadian inmates were transferred out of Petawawa to Internment Camp 101 at Angler, Ontario. At the Angler camp, the authorities took deliberate steps to ensure that the military guards were explicitly informed of the inmates' true legal status: they were Canadian citizens who were formally "detained at the pleasure of the Minister of Justice," rather than foreign prisoners of war. The Petawawa incident thus stands as a harrowing testament to the intense internal divisions within the Japanese Canadian resistance and the deadly perils of the Canadian government's policy of treating its own citizens as enemy combatants.

6. Sugar Beet Farm Strikes (Spring 1943)

Summary

Japanese Canadian families sent to Alberta sugar beet farms refused en masse to sign their 1943 contracts until growers agreed to address poor housing and permit the proper redistribution of mismatched families.

Main text

In early 1942, the Canadian government enacted a sweeping and racially discriminatory policy, forcibly uprooting over 22,000 Japanese Canadians from the protected coastal areas of British Columbia. The federal government's initial strategy dictated that adult male Japanese Canadians be separated from their wives and children and sent to isolated road construction camps in the British Columbia interior and Ontario. This draconian policy of forced family separation caused profound distress and outrage within the Japanese Canadian community. In a desperate attempt to keep their families intact, hundreds of Japanese Canadians from the Fraser Valley sought an alternative to the road camps. Recognizing a critical agricultural Labour shortage in the Prairie provinces, the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) established a program to send Japanese Canadian families to work on sugar beet farms in Alberta and Manitoba. Enticed by government promises of decent housing, a reasonable standard of living, relative freedom of movement, and the preservation of their family units, entire communities from the Fraser Valley volunteered en masse for the sugar beet project. By mid-April 1942, 2,664 Japanese Canadians had arrived in Alberta to begin agricultural work.

However, the reality they encountered upon arrival in Alberta sparked profound anger and ultimately led to a massive Labour strike in the spring of 1943. The trauma of the sugar beet project began immediately at the railway stations, where the process of allocating families to farmers was completely arbitrary and humiliating. Families and their baggage were dumped onto the grass, and white farmers simply arrived to inspect the crowds, selecting whichever families they believed would be the most productive. The farmers naturally prioritized families with a high number of able-bodied workers and actively rejected families burdened with small children or comprised solely of young girls. This chaotic selection process led to a severe mismatch between the size of Japanese Canadian families and the actual Labour

requirements of the allotted beet acreage. A family of five was theoretically expected to earn approximately \$1,320 per year, based on a contract rate of \$33 per acre, assuming one worker could comfortably manage eight acres of beets. Unfortunately, due to haphazard selection at the train stations, family sizes were frequently too large or too small for their assigned plots, creating immediate economic stress and interpersonal friction on the farms.

The abysmal living conditions further exacerbated the growing resentment. The Fraser Valley Japanese Canadians had been highly successful pioneer farmers who were accustomed to living in comfortable, modern conditions by 1940. In stark contrast, they arrived in Alberta to find that they were expected to survive in crude, uninsulated granaries, abandoned bachelor miner shacks, and even filthy chicken coops. Families of five, six, or more were crammed into tiny twelve-by-twenty-foot or ten-by-eighteen-foot shacks. In some instances, groups of up to eleven people—including elderly grandparents and infants—were forced to share a single uninsulated granary. Essential amenities were nonexistent; drinking and washing water frequently had to be hauled from distant ponds, sloughs, or irrigation ditches. When winter arrived, the poorly constructed board-and-batten huts offered virtually no protection against brutal prairie temperatures that plummeted to forty degrees below zero. Furthermore, the evacuees were deliberately barred from seeking winter off-season employment in nearby cities like Lethbridge, Edmonton, and Calgary due to fiercely anti-Asian municipal policies. Consequently, by the spring of 1943, 90 percent of the uprooted Japanese Canadians in Alberta were trapped in dire economic straits, and 42 percent were forced to rely on meagre government relief funds to survive the freezing winter.

Faced with severe poverty, inadequate housing, and exploitative farmers who often treated them as prisoners of war or slave Labour, the Japanese Canadians refused to remain passive victims. Although the authorities expressly forbade them from forming any organizations, they began to organize clandestinely. Because they had moved in complete village units from the Fraser Valley, much of their pre-war social structure and leadership networks remained intact. In Alberta, this organizing effort was spearheaded by Seiku Sakumoto, a former English-language secretary of the Japanese Camp and Mill Workers Union. He was assisted by Sadayoshi Aoki and Minoru Kudo, both of whom had been highly respected Japanese-language school principals before the uprooting. Together, they laid the groundwork for an organizational meeting for all Japanese beet workers in the Northern Irrigation District. Held secretly and illegally in an open field near Picture Butte, this meeting resulted in the formation of the *Shogo Endo Kai* (Beet Workers Association), with Sakumoto elected as president. Alongside a similar organization, the *Shinwa Kai* (Benefit Association), formed for workers south of the Old Man River, the Japanese Canadians forged a unified Labour front.

The breaking point arrived in the spring of 1943. By this time, 175 families had formally requested transfers to other farms due to severe friction with their white employers or due to an initial mismatch between their family size and the assigned farm acreage. The Alberta Sugar Beet Growers Association, however, rigidly opposed any freedom of movement, choosing to interpret their contract with the BCSC as meaning that Japanese Labour must remain frozen to their originally assigned farms for the entire duration of the war. Recognizing that individual arguments with the growers were entirely futile, the Japanese beet workers utilized their newly formed associations to take collective action. They calmly negotiated the financial terms of their 1943 beet contracts with the growers. Then, in a stunning display of Labour solidarity, the Japanese Canadian families refused en masse to sign them. The workers

declared an absolute strike, withholding their indispensable agricultural Labour until the growers explicitly agreed to permit the proper redistribution of misplaced and mismatched families.

The mass refusal to sign the contracts effectively paralyzed the Alberta sugar beet industry just as the crucial planting season was set to begin. The white growers, who had anticipated utilizing a compliant and easily exploitable workforce, were suddenly faced with a resolute and highly organized opposition. They painfully discovered that they were not dealing with docile slave Labour. By importing the Japanese Canadians, the growers had inadvertently traded their traditional Eastern European union for a much tougher Japanese union. Because the Japanese Canadians had been legally barred from all alternative forms of employment, they had absolutely no choice but to maintain total solidarity; no worker could afford to break the strike. Faced with the catastrophic loss of their entire beet crop, the growers and the authorities completely capitulated.

The spring 1943 sugar beet strike yielded a definitive victory for the Japanese Canadian Labourers. The housing and contract issues were addressed simultaneously, and the growers conceded to allow the 175 mismatched families to relocate to more suitable farms. To further ease tensions, the Security Commission provided building materials so that the Japanese Canadians could finally improve their abysmal shacks. Having successfully secured their basic right to freedom of movement and improved their living conditions, the Japanese Canadians threw themselves into their work, ultimately producing a record Canadian beet crop. By 1944, their economic stability had improved so drastically that the number of families on relief plummeted to less than six percent. The Sugar Beet Farm Strike of 1943 stands as a powerful historical testament to the resilience, agency, and organizational strength of Japanese Canadians, proving that even in forced exile, they possessed the unity to collectively challenge economic exploitation and demand basic human dignity.

7. National Selective Service (NSS) Evasion (1943)

Summary

When the government attempted to enforce compulsory job placements in Eastern Canada, many Nisei actively evaded the RCMP by going house-to-house into hiding, boycotting medical checkups, or tearing up their NSS certificates.

Main text

In early 1943, the Canadian government dissolved the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) and transferred the administration of the displaced Japanese Canadian population to the Japanese Affairs Branch of the Department of Labour. With this administrative shift came a renewed federal focus on two primary objectives: minimizing government expenditures and permanently dispersing Japanese Canadians across the country to prevent their return to the Pacific Coast. To achieve this forced dispersal, the federal government sought to exploit the severe wartime labour shortages in Eastern Canada. On January 19, 1943, the government promulgated the National Selective Service (NSS) Civilian Regulation, a wartime measure designed to allow the state to allocate the domestic workforce to prioritize war efforts. While initially intended for the general Canadian populace, the federal government quickly weaponized this legislation against the already disenfranchised Japanese Canadian community, sparking a massive campaign of civil disobedience and organized evasion.

The legal machinery for this forced Labour dispersal was cemented on February 5, 1943, with the passage of Order-in-Council P.C. 946. This sweeping directive granted the Minister of Labour, Humphrey Mitchell, the extraordinary power to require any person of the Japanese race to proceed to any place in Canada at any time he prescribed, and to dictate the exact localities where they were allowed to reside. Under these new powers, the Department of Labour established the "Commission of Japanese Placement," which was explicitly tasked with forcing single male Japanese Canadians—primarily unmarried Canadian-born Nisei and naturalized citizens between the ages of 18 and 55—out of the interior internment camps and into designated workplaces in Eastern Canada. To financially compel their compliance, the government simultaneously prohibited these single men from taking any employment within British Columbia if they were currently out of work.

The application of the National Selective Service regulations to Japanese Canadians created a bitter and infuriating paradox regarding citizenship. Because the forced mass evacuation of 1942 was justified on the grounds of "national security," the government had indiscriminately uprooted everyone of Japanese descent, completely ignoring the legal distinction between Canadian citizens and Japanese aliens. Yet, when the NSS regulations were implemented, they were selectively applied only to Canadian citizens (the Nisei and naturalized Issei). Japanese nationals, as aliens, were legally exempt from the NSS draft because they fell under the protective mandate of the Spanish government—the protecting power under the Geneva Convention—and the International Red Cross. This created a bizarre reality where "enemy aliens" were in a safer and more secure position than native-born Canadian citizens. The Nisei deeply resented this hypocritical manipulation of their legal status, viewing the NSS not as a patriotic duty, but as a racially targeted penalty. As one Nisei poignantly summarized the frustration: **"Sure, we're Japs, but only Canadians when it's convenient for them to consider us Canadians".**

Before turning to outright evasion, the Nisei articulated their opposition through formal petitions and protests wired directly to Labour Minister Mitchell and other federal officials. They presented a series of undeniable logical arguments against the compulsory job placements. First, they questioned the hypocrisy of being evacuated as a despised racial group, only to be drafted as "Canadian citizens" to solve Eastern Labour shortages. Second, they pointed out that if their Labour was so desperately needed for the Canadian war effort, there was ample work available in British Columbia; they argued it was a question of *what* they should do for the country, not *where* they should be forced to do it. Finally, they demanded to know *why*, if they were truly being treated as citizens, they were not allowed to freely choose their own employment in the East, and they asked that the regulations be withheld until their citizenship status was permanently clarified. Federal officials, however, never expressed any crisis of conscience about Canadian citizens who had been unjustly confined as security risks now being coerced into compulsory national service without consultation or representation.

When the federal government ignored these reasonable petitions and attempted to ruthlessly enforce compulsory job placements, the Nisei transitioned from formal protest to aggressive underground civil disobedience. The resistance was characterized by a systematic campaign of sabotage against the NSS's bureaucratic processes. Before being dispatched to Eastern Canada, targeted Nisei men were summoned to undergo mandatory medical checkups. In response, the young men initiated a widespread boycott of the clinics. Many simply refused to show up for their scheduled medical examinations. Even when authorities managed to force some Nisei to attend the clinics, the men would actively sabotage the paperwork; upon receiving their medical clearance certificates, they would

immediately tear them up and throw them away as soon as they left the building. Furthermore, as the compulsory placement regulations were extended into the interior detention camps, many men overtly demonstrated their absolute defiance by tearing up their official NSS certificates.

Faced with this blatant non-compliance, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) were deployed to track down the evaders and enforce the government's orders. However, the Nisei anticipated the RCMP sweeps and embarked on a highly coordinated campaign of physical evasion. **The young men went underground, engaging in a house-to-house evasion of the authorities.** They actively hid from the police, relying on the solidarity of the tightly knit internment camp communities to shelter them and warn them of approaching officers. The RCMP, increasingly frustrated by the situation, conducted extensive manhunts but frequently found themselves empty-handed; the targeted men simply vanished when the police were looking for them. The Nisei evaders would only emerge and wander freely around the camps when they knew the RCMP were not in the vicinity. The Japanese Canadians proudly referred to this organized, non-violent resistance against the federal government as **"holding out"**.

The Nisei's reluctance to cooperate was further solidified by the dismal prospects awaiting them in Eastern Canada. Moving east meant leaving the relative safety of their families and the established Japanese Canadian communities in the interior camps. Furthermore, the Nisei were well aware of the intense racial hostility that permeated Eastern provinces. White populations in Ontario and Quebec were highly unwelcoming; most towns and municipalities had passed local resolutions explicitly prohibiting Japanese Canadians from residing within their borders until the end of the war. Even Toronto, Canada's largest eastern city, formally declared itself closed to Japanese Canadian resettlement in the summer of 1943. Stripped of the right to own real estate or open businesses, and anticipating severe housing shortages and intense workplace discrimination, the Nisei saw no incentive to abandon their families for a hostile "foreign country" east of the Rockies. They knew they would be relegated to low-paying, menial Labour, entirely incommensurate with their education and skills.

Ultimately, the fierce and uncompromising "holding out" campaign paralyzed the government's compulsory dispersal program. **The resistance was so effective that it took the Department of Labour nine agonizing months just to successfully dispatch a meagre group of 18 Nisei to a logging camp in Fort William, Ontario.** At the same time, the federal government's policy was undermined by severe Labour shortages within British Columbia itself. The province was in desperate need of lumber workers, and local sawmill owners, desperate for skilled Labour, began petitioning the Department of Labour to stop sending the highly capable Nisei to the East. Faced with the absolute failure of NSS enforcement, the Nisei's steadfast evasion, and the economic demands of British Columbia's industries, the federal government was forced to capitulate. In December 1943, the Department of Labour officially lifted its ban on single males taking jobs within British Columbia, effectively signalling that the compulsory enforcement of National Selective Service placements had been completely defeated by the resolute civil disobedience of the Japanese Canadian youth.

8. Property Dispossession Lawsuits (1943–1944)

Summary

Following the forced liquidation of their assets, internees formed the Japanese Property Owners' Association. They raised \$6,500 and filed Petitions of Right in the Exchequer Court of Canada to legally

challenge the Custodian of Enemy Property's right to sell their farms and homes without their consent. *The New Canadian* editor Tom Shoyama abandoned his prior stance of cooperation to fiercely condemn the confiscations as an "indefensible" act of a "race war".

Main text

During the 1942 forced uprooting of Japanese Canadians from the Pacific Coast, evacuees were explicitly assured by Order-in-Council P.C. 1665 that their homes, farms, and businesses would be placed in the custody of the Custodian of Enemy Property "as a protective measure only". However, motivated by political pressure to prevent Japanese Canadians from ever returning to British Columbia, and desiring to use the proceeds to force internees to pay for their own incarceration, the federal government fundamentally betrayed this trust. On January 19, 1943, Order-in-Council P.C. 469 was passed under the War Measures Act, granting the Custodian the absolute power to liquidate all Japanese Canadian real estate and personal property without the owners' consent. This draconian measure transformed the Custodian from a temporary protector into a broker for the enforced liquidation of the community's entire life's work, selling off assets in a flooded buyers' market for mere fractions of their true value.

The announcement of total dispossession sent shockwaves through the Japanese Canadian community and profoundly altered its political response. Prior to this betrayal, Tom Shoyama, the highly influential editor of the English-language newspaper *The New Canadian*, had staunchly advocated a philosophy of "law-abiding cooperation". **Shoyama had continuously argued that by submitting peacefully to the unjust relocation orders, the Canadian-born Nisei would definitively prove their absolute loyalty as exemplary citizens and ultimately secure their post-war democratic rights.** However, the forced liquidation shattered his faith in the government's temporary wartime motives. In a historic and fiercely worded editorial published on April 10, 1943, Shoyama dropped his carefully guarded professional restraint to rage against the federal policy. **He condemned the total dispossession as "the last dose of bitter medicine from their own government," declaring it to be "a policy as indefensible as this from any point of view except the dictates of a race war".** He argued that this devastating financial ruin had long exceeded the bounds of justice, reason, or military necessity.

Given that *The New Canadian* was the only Japanese Canadian newspaper permitted to publish during the war and operated under strict government censorship, Shoyama's explosive editorial could easily have been suppressed. Yet, the Canadian authorities deliberately chose to let his scathing criticism stand. **Government officials pragmatically recognized that the uprooted Japanese Canadians were gripped by an immense, impotent rage over the theft of their properties, and completely silencing the community's primary voice might have triggered widespread rioting or passive rebellion.** Allowing Shoyama to articulate their collective grief and anger served as a strategic safety valve to release explosive tensions. Furthermore, because Shoyama channelled this profound frustration into advocating for an orderly, constitutional, and legalistic protest rather than violent civil disobedience, the censors tolerated his outrage.

Inspired by the outrage articulated in *The New Canadian* and recognizing that isolated objections would be futile, the Japanese Canadian community swiftly mobilized into a unified legal front. On March 31, 1943, internees confined in the Kaslo detention camp established the Japanese Property Owners' Association under the leadership of Dr. Kozo Shimotakahara, a respected physician, and Saburo

Shinobu. Within a week, similar groups were formed in every detention camp and self-supporting project across British Columbia, all affiliating with the central Kaslo organization. **Determined to test the federal government's power to liquidate their assets, the Association launched a grassroots fundraising campaign, collecting \$6,500 from approximately 650 property owners.** This represented a monumental financial sacrifice for families who were trapped in internment camps, cut off from their livelihoods, and surviving on severely restricted savings.

Armed with community funding, the Japanese Property Owners' Association retained prominent Vancouver lawyers Arthur MacLennan and T.G. Norris to halt the sales. In late July 1943, these attorneys filed Petitions of Right in the Exchequer Court of Canada against the Secretary of State, seeking a legal injunction to restrain the Custodian from proceeding with the liquidations. The test cases were strategically filed on behalf of different legal classes of Japanese Canadians: Eikichi Nakashima (a naturalized citizen), Tadao Wakabayashi (a Canadian-born *Nisei*), and Jitaro and Takejiro Tanaka (Japanese nationals). **The legal counsel forcefully argued two major points: first, that the Custodian had explicitly undertaken to hold the properties in trust "as a protective measure only," and second, that the sweeping Orders-in-Council were "invalid and unconstitutional" because the forced sale of civilian property had absolutely no relevance to the "national security" mandate of the War Measures Act.**

Despite the urgency of the matter, the federal government and the Canadian judiciary engaged in a frustrating campaign of obstruction and delay. While petitions to the Exchequer Court typically took only four to six weeks to be heard, the Japanese Canadian lawsuits were deliberately stalled until May 29 and 30, 1944, nearly a year after they were filed. When the hearing finally commenced, the proceedings went from bad to worse. Before the claimants' lawyers could even present their constitutional arguments, the Crown introduced a procedural blockade, arguing that the Custodian of Enemy Property was not actually a servant of the Crown and thus could not be sued in the Exchequer Court. **Capitalizing on this legal impasse, the presiding judge, Justice J.T. Thorson—who ironically had been the Minister of National War Services in the very 1942 Cabinet that had originally uprooted the Japanese Canadians—adjourned the case indefinitely.**

True to the government's obstructionist tactics, Justice Thorson procrastinated for three agonizing years before finally delivering a negative judgment on August 28, 1947. **When Thorson finally ruled, he dismissed the case based not on broad constitutional issues of justice or civil rights, but on a convoluted "legal squabble".** He determined that the Custodian was an independent statutory officer, not a servant or agent of the Crown, meaning that the property owners had erroneously sued the wrong entity. Furthermore, Thorson chillingly ruled that the Exchequer Court had no right to substitute its own opinion for what the Cabinet deemed "necessary or advisable" under the War Measures Act. Because of these immense judicial delays, the lawsuit's original purpose was completely thwarted. By the time Thorson handed down his decision in 1947, the forced liquidation was practically complete, with an estimated \$11.5 million in Japanese Canadian property having been ruthlessly sold for a mere \$5.3 million. While the Property Dispossession Lawsuits ultimately failed to save their homes and farms, the fiercely organized legal resistance catalyzed by Shoyama's editorial demonstrated that Japanese Canadians would not meekly accept the destruction of their livelihoods, laying the essential political groundwork for the post-war redress movements.

III. After World War II (Deportation, Dispersal, and Redress)

1. The Anti-Deportation Campaign (1945–1947)

Summary

Facing government coercion to sign "repatriation" papers to Japan, the Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy (JCCD), camp committees, and civil liberties groups launched a massive resistance movement. Thousands of individuals petitioned to have their signatures revoked. Through their lawyers, they threatened the government with hundreds of writs of *habeas corpus* and fought the deportation Orders-in-Council up to the Supreme Court of Canada and the Privy Council, eventually forcing Prime Minister Mackenzie King to repeal the deportation orders.

Main text

As the Second World War ended, the Canadian federal government introduced a harsh policy designed to permanently disperse or exile its Japanese Canadian population. In April and May of 1945, the government initiated a "repatriation survey" that forced the inmates of the detention camps in British Columbia to choose between immediate resettlement east of the Rocky Mountains or repatriation to Japan at some unspecified future date. This was not a truly voluntary choice; rather, it was a coercive ultimatum calculated to induce the bitter, confused, and impoverished inmates to choose Japan. Government officials and RCMP officers informed the inmates that those who chose to remain in Canada would be forced to move east immediately, warning that failure to accept government-assigned employment would be deemed a lack of cooperation and could disqualify their families from receiving relief benefits. Faced with the threat of being forced into hostile eastern cities where housing was scarce and expensive, and desperate to avoid further family separation, many felt they had no choice but to sign the repatriation forms.

The number of signatures was further inflated by the propaganda of pro-Japan patriots within the camps, who genuinely believed Japan was winning the war, as well as by the profound despair of elderly *Issei* (first-generation immigrants) who had lost all their property and despaired of ever re-establishing themselves in Canada. Furthermore, government administrators provided misleading information, with some telling inmates that signing the form did not imply disloyalty and that they could easily revoke their requests later if conditions for staying in Canada improved. Driven by fear, coercion, and confusion, 6,884 Japanese Canadians aged sixteen and over signed the repatriation requests. Including their dependents, these potential deportees represented nearly 43 percent of Canada's entire Japanese minority.

The sudden capitulation of Japan in August 1945 fundamentally altered the situation. With the realization that Japan was a starving, devastated nation, the influence of the pro-Japan patriots collapsed, and thousands of Japanese Canadians who had signed under duress quickly sought to revoke their signatures. By April 1946, 4,527 of the adult signers had applied to remain in Canada. However, the federal government, driven by fiercely anti-Japanese politicians like Ian Mackenzie and Labour Minister Humphrey Mitchell, sought to make the original signatures binding. On December 15, 1945, the Cabinet passed three draconian Orders-in-Council under the expiring War Measures Act: P.C. 7355, 7356, and 7357. These orders authorized the deportation of roughly 10,000 Japanese Canadians,

stripped deported naturalized citizens of their Canadian status, and established a loyalty tribunal to investigate any remaining individuals.

Recognizing the imminent danger, a massive resistance movement emerged, spearheaded by the **Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy (JCCD)** in Toronto. Working alongside camp committees in the Slocan Valley and the Prairies, the JCCD collected sworn statements from unwilling signers detailing the coercion used to obtain their signatures. In late May 1945, the JCCD allied with representatives from major churches, Labour unions, and civil liberties associations to form the **Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians (CCJC)**. Together, they launched an intensive, nationwide public education campaign to combat the widespread ignorance in Eastern Canada regarding the abuses suffered by Japanese Canadians. They distributed tens of thousands of pamphlets, such as *From Citizens to Refugees — It's Happening Here!* organized regional public meetings and flooded Ottawa with petitions. The political pressure mounted as Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) politicians vehemently attacked the deportation orders in Parliament, branding the Liberal government's policy an "organized hypocrisy" and a racist "crime against humanity".

While the CCJC mobilized public opinion, they also launched a fierce legal battle to halt the deportations. When the government attempted to prevent Vancouver lawyer Robert J. MacMaster from meeting with his Japanese Canadian clients at the Tashme camp, MacMaster discovered a crucial legal vulnerability in the government's plan. He realized that while actual deportation could not be challenged without government consent, the *detention* of the deportees prior to sailing could be contested. Because the war was officially over, the peacetime legal principle of *habeas corpus* applied, prohibiting detention without trial. MacMaster and the CCJC threatened the federal government with hundreds of individual writs of *habeas corpus*. Knowing that processing these writs would completely paralyze the tight shipping schedule required for the deportations, the government was forced to negotiate.

To bypass the *habeas corpus* threat and avoid a parliamentary confrontation, the Cabinet agreed to refer the Orders-in-Council to the Supreme Court of Canada to test their legality. In January 1946, CCJC lawyers Andrew Brewin and J.R. Cartwright argued before the Supreme Court that the War Measures Act did not authorize the exile of Canadian citizens, and that deporting individuals solely on racial grounds violated fundamental international law. On February 20, 1946, the deeply divided Supreme Court handed down its decision: the justices unanimously declared the deportation of Japanese aliens and naturalized citizens to be legal but split 5 to 2 in favour of deporting Canadian-born *Nisei*, and ruled 4 to 3 against deporting the unwilling dependents of the male deportees.

This fractured judicial ruling deeply embarrassed the federal government, which then appealed the case to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London. In December 1946, the Privy Council upheld the Supreme Court's ruling, holding that under the War Measures Act's extreme emergency powers, the Canadian government could legally do whatever it wanted, regardless of the policy's wisdom or propriety.

However, while the federal government ultimately won the legal battle, the protracted court proceedings had bought the resistance precious time. Over the course of 1946, the relentless advocacy of the JCCD, the CCJC, and their allies had successfully shifted Canadian public opinion. The Canadian public unequivocally told their government to stop abusing Japanese Canadians, making mass deportation not only politically unnecessary but highly unwise. Recognizing the overwhelming public backlash and the

political dangers of continuing an inhumane policy, Prime Minister Mackenzie King formally announced on January 24, 1947, that the deportation orders would be repealed. Although nearly 4,000 Japanese Canadians—broken by their wartime trauma—still sailed for a devastated Japan, the organized resistance successfully prevented the forced exile of thousands of others. **The Anti-Deportation Campaign marked a monumental turning point, proving that Japanese Canadians, allied with concerned citizens, could successfully wield coordinated political and legal action to defeat the repressive ambitions of a racist state.**

2. The Moose Jaw Incident (1946–1948)

Summary

In a prolonged two-year *ganbari* (passive resistance) confrontation, 128 internees transferred from the Angler POW camp to a hostel in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, refused to cooperate with eviction and relocation orders. In freezing temperatures, 12 residents staged a 48-hour candlelit sit-down strike after the government cut off their food, water, and heat. When sheriffs finally dragged them from their beds, their 65-year-old leader, Hirokichi Isomura, physically resisted by drawing a knife.

Main text

Following the end of the Second World War, the Canadian government refused to allow Japanese Canadians to return to the Pacific Coast and instead enacted a coercive policy designed to permanently disperse the population. Individuals were forced to either accept deportation to a starving Japan or relocate "east of the Rockies" to destinations chosen by the Department of Labour. To facilitate this forced dispersal, the government established temporary hostels in provinces like Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario, often repurposing crude military airbases and former prisoner-of-war camps. These facilities featured minimal privacy, partitioned by walls that intentionally did not reach the ceiling, to deliberately discourage long-term residency and pressure evacuees into quickly seeking outside employment. However, for a specific group of internees, this final relocation order became the catalyst for one of the most dramatic and prolonged acts of civil disobedience in Japanese Canadian history. **In July 1946, 128 Nisei and Issei internees from the high-security Angler internment camp in Ontario were shipped to a hostel in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.** These men were the hardline remnants of the 425 individuals still incarcerated in Ontario on V-J Day because they had adamantly refused to cooperate with the original 1942 evacuation, relocation, and repatriation orders.

The Moose Jaw hostel was located at a former RCAF depot four miles south of the city. The transfer of these hardened resisters a thousand miles to Saskatchewan—the only Canadian province governed by the CCF, a political party that had consistently criticized the Liberal government's wartime policies—set the stage for a bitter, two-year confrontation. At its peak in late 1946, the Moose Jaw facility housed around 280 people. **The internees initiated a prolonged campaign of *ganbari*—a Japanese cultural concept denoting resolute, passive resistance and endurance against overwhelming odds.** The resistance formally crystallized in the spring of 1947 when residents outright refused government offers of employment and ignored an official notice to vacate the premises by May 30. While the Commissioner of Japanese Placement, J.F. MacKinnon, eventually persuaded the majority of the residents to leave for work or transfer to other eastern hostels, a hard core of resisters remained deeply entrenched. This remaining faction included 11 internees and their families, totaling 61 persons,

alongside 24 single male internees. Their defiance was rooted in a profound sense of injustice and a demand for civil rights. **An Issei spokesman for the group articulated that their refusal to move was inseparable from the government's theft of their life savings and the lack of a fair trial, demanding "more security or financial help" before they would agree to start their lives anew.** Similarly, Tsuneo Naka, a 26-year-old Nisei, publicly stated that they were fighting eviction "as a matter of principle," demanding compensation for their seized businesses, homes, and the five years they had been unjustly held in internment camps without cause.

The standoff became a source of acute embarrassment for the federal Department of Labour, which possessed the legal authority under Order-in-Council P.C. 946 to forcibly evict the group, impose heavy fines, or sentence them to jail. Reluctant to resort to such drastic political optics, the government initially attempted to starve the resisters into submission. **In August 1947, officials announced a final closing date and terminated all food supplies to the hostel.** They also began arresting some of the most vocal resisters, including three Issei who had declared they "would rather die" than leave; these men were taken into RCMP custody and shipped away to New Denver under armed guard, with some observed to be without shoes or shirts. When mess hall services were suspended, the remaining hostellers survived only through the charity of sympathetic white Canadians and local Japanese residents in the city of Moose Jaw, especially after the International Red Cross office in Montreal turned down their pleas for assistance. The government's strong-arm tactics drew fierce political criticism, notably from Ross Thatcher, the CCF Member of Parliament for Moose Jaw, who wired Prime Minister Mackenzie King to protest that the "democratic rights of Canadian citizens" were being endangered by starvation tactics and policies that resembled those of "a police state".

Despite the mounting pressure, 58 individuals remained determined to "sit tight" in the barracks, including a 65-year-old World War I veteran named Hirokichi Isomura and his family. A surreal atmosphere of desperation hung over the camp. **Some of the men, wracked by an inordinate sense of persecution after six years of incarceration, still wore their grey Ontario internment camp uniforms with red stripes down the sides and large red circles on their backs, while others made dramatic threats of *hara-kiri* (ritual suicide) as their funds ran out.** The confrontation reached a dangerous climax during the brutal prairie winter. **As temperatures plummeted to 16 degrees below zero, the government escalated its tactics by cutting off the hostel's water, electricity, and heat.** In response, on February 7, 1948, twelve people—including two Nisei girls—staged a 48-hour "sit-down strike," huddling together in the freezing darkness illuminated only by candlelight. RCMP officers transported the freezing protesters to Moose Jaw for a medical examination, but upon finding them "none the worse for their experience," herded them back into the camp. Prodded by their "ring-leader," Isomura, and his 26-year-old son Kunio, the men defiantly resumed their strike in the corridor outside the supervisor's office, vowing to remain until the federal government lifted its restrictive policies on the movement of Japanese Canadians.

The two-year passive revolt was finally crushed by brute force on July 15, 1948. Sheriff G.G. Russell, accompanied by a team of deputies and moving vans, gave the remaining residents exactly half an hour to vacate the premises. **When the internees refused to comply, the sheriffs physically moved them out, dragging two elderly Issei directly from their beds.** The residents' belongings were unceremoniously dumped in a field north of the barracks. **During the chaotic forced eviction, 65-year-old Hirokichi Isomura physically resisted the authorities by drawing a knife on the sheriff.** This act

of violent resistance was a tragic irony, given that Isomura had previously fought for Canada in World War I. Isomura was subsequently arrested, subjected to a three-day trial, and convicted of obstruction; he received a three-month suspended sentence and was required to post a \$200 peace bond, narrowly avoiding jail time only due to the intervention of MP Ross Thatcher.

Even after the physical eviction, the militant spirit of *ganbari* lingered among a few holdouts. Several evicted residents, supplied with pup tents by Thatcher, camped outside the hostel gates. While most gave up after a few days, two elderly Issei men, 65-year-old Tomijiro Naka and 57-year-old Suekichi Miyagawa, maintained a stubborn vigil outside the hostel for an astonishing 136 days before finally succumbing to the Department of Labour's offer to move into an old folks' home in New Denver.

Ultimately, the Moose Jaw resisters were viewed with mixed feelings by their peers. They were the only group to carry their resistance to such desperate, prolonged lengths during the post-war era, but their actions failed to gain widespread sympathy from a broader Japanese Canadian community that largely favoured moderate assimilation and quiet rebuilding. The episode highlighted the intense fracturing within the community; moderate *Nisei* leaders in Eastern Canada eschewed such melodramatic demonstrations of martyrdom, viewing the Moose Jaw holdouts as ill-advised and warped by their long years of internment. **Yet, while the Moose Jaw incident was thoroughly against the grain of the community's general conformist behaviour, it remains a powerful symbol of the raw frustration and unbreakable will of those who refused to let the theft of their livelihoods go unchallenged.**

3. The Bird Commission Boycott Movement (1947)

Summary

When the government formed a Royal Commission with deliberately narrow terms to investigate property losses, the Toronto Claimants Committee pushed for a "wholesale boycott" of the settlement, demanding full compensation and fiercely criticizing the commission's arbitrary awards

Main text

The systemic dispossession of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War was executed through the forced liquidation of their homes, farms, and businesses. Initially assured that their assets would be held by the Custodian of Enemy Property "as a protective measure only," Japanese Canadians were profoundly betrayed when Order-in-Council P.C. 469 authorized the arbitrary sale of their property without their consent in 1943. Sold in a flooded market, properties were auctioned off for mere fractions of their true value, devastating the community's economic foundation. Following the war, relentless lobbying and the exposure of administrative irregularities by the Public Accounts Committee finally forced the federal government to establish a Royal Commission to investigate these property losses in 1947. However, the government's approach to restitution triggered fierce resistance, culminating in the Bird Commission Boycott Movement spearheaded by the Toronto Claimants Committee.

The conflict ignited immediately upon the creation of the Royal Commission in July 1947 under Order-in-Council P.C. 1810, presided over by Justice Henry Bird. The government deliberately designed the commission's terms of reference to be "ludicrously limited" and "totally ineffectual". Under these original terms, compensation would be considered only if a claimant could legally prove that the Custodian had failed "to exercise reasonable care" and was actively negligent in supervising or selling

the property—an impossible legal burden for the dispersed evacuees. Recognizing that these terms were designed to whitewash the government's actions, Andrew Brewin, legal counsel for the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians (CCJC), warned the government that Japanese Canadians were highly likely to boycott the Royal Commission entirely and publicly expose the sham.

Faced with this threat, Justice Minister J.L. Ilsley persuaded the Cabinet to slightly expand the terms of reference in September 1947 (P.C. 3737) to include property disposed of by the Custodian for less than fair market value or stolen while in custody. However, **the concessions were strictly limited; Justice Bird refused to hear claims for losses sustained before the Custodian took direct control or for property that was not under his direct management.** These arbitrary limitations enraged a militant faction of claimants in Toronto, who immediately urged a "wholesale boycott" of the Claims Commission. This group operated on the uncompromising principle that the government had fundamentally broken its explicit promise to hold their property in safekeeping and, therefore, the state was morally and legally responsible for all resulting losses, not just those that met Bird's narrow criteria.

While this initial boycott movement temporarily subsided when the majority of claimants and the National Japanese Canadian Citizens Association (NJCCA) reluctantly agreed to participate "under protest," it marked the beginning of a profound ideological rift within the community. The NJCCA and CCJC hoped that participating in the inquiry would uncover enough evidence of gross injustice to force the government to broaden the terms later. However, as the inquiry dragged on through 1948 and 1949, this pragmatic approach yielded disappointing results, particularly for those who had owned property in Vancouver.

To expedite the sluggish proceedings, Justice Bird proposed a formula of category settlements based on general percentage allowances. For the highly contested Vancouver real estate claims, the results were disastrous. **Bird dismissed the claimants' arguments that their properties had been artificially devalued, ruling instead that the Custodian's management had been "sound and businesslike".** Rejecting even the Crown counsel's suggestion of a 10 percent award, Bird recommended a meagre 5 percent rebate, which essentially refunded only the commissions the Custodian had wrongfully charged the Japanese owners for confiscating and selling their own property without their consent.

This insultingly low award instantly resurrected the boycott movement with intense ferocity. **The Toronto Claimants Committee (TCC), representing the owners of approximately 175 Vancouver properties who were outraged by the 5 percent proposal, actively pushed to boycott any final settlement until the Vancouver awards were substantially increased.** Rejecting the findings as a "total inadequacy," the 54 vocal Toronto claimants fiercely criticized Bird's arbitrary general allowance as completely unjust. The situation escalated significantly in September 1950, when the Custodian required all claimants to sign a sweeping legal release form to receive their settlement cheques. By signing, claimants were forced to release the Crown and the Custodian "from all actions, claims and demands whatsoever" regarding their property, forever closing the door on future justice.

The TCC launched a militant campaign to prevent claimants from signing the release forms, arguing that doing so would allow the government to permanently bury the issue of full compensation. The committee, led by fierce advocates such as Senji Takashima, Roger Obata, and Kunio Hidaka—who had explicitly resigned from the more moderate CCJC in protest—advised all claimants to withhold their signatures. They utilized public meetings and the pages of *The New*

Canadian newspaper to mount scurrilous attacks against the compromised settlement and to rally the Japanese Canadian minority behind a unified boycott.

This militant stance provoked a bitter, simmering feud with the NJCCA and the CCJC. The moderate leadership argued that holding out for full compensation was a delusion. After years of defeats, exhaustive legal battles, and the realization that many elderly *Issei* were dying before seeing a single cent of restitution, the NJCCA firmly believed that the government would never accede to further requests. They argued that launching another major boycott or legal test was entirely futile and urged the community to accept the money, even as they acknowledged that the awards fell grotesquely short of rectifying the physical and moral wrongs inflicted by the state.

When polled, the exhausted Japanese Canadian claimants at large overwhelmingly supported the pragmatic positions of the NJCCA and the CCJC. Although the awards were accepted in mid-1949 with a strong formal protest of the Vancouver decisions, the boycott movement's impact left deep scars. **The confrontation between the TCC and the moderate leadership was incredibly acrimonious and vituperative, resulting in some furious claimants returning deliberately mutilated release forms to the CCJC in an act of profound disgust.**

While the Toronto Claimants Committee failed to secure a "wholesale boycott," their militant resistance served a crucial historical purpose. **They refused to be pacified by token restitution and continuously highlighted the fundamental immorality of a government dictating the narrow terms by which it would investigate its own systemic abuses.** By demanding full compensation and fiercely criticizing the arbitrary limitations of the Bird Commission, the boycott movement proved that the Japanese Canadian community remained deeply unwilling to forgive or forget the unconstitutional destruction of their livelihoods, an enduring demand for true justice that would eventually culminate in the successful Redress campaign decades later.

4. Post-War Civil Rights Push (1948)

Summary

The National Japanese Canadian Citizens Association (NJCCA) mobilized protests, telegrams, and unions to successfully defeat a British Columbia bill attempting to ban Japanese Canadians from working on Crown timber lands.

Main text

Following the end of the Second World War, the Canadian government maintained a repressive regime of restrictions against Japanese Canadians, continuing to ban them from returning to the Pacific Coast and perpetuating their exile in the name of political expediency. For the uprooted community, the immediate post-war years were characterized by profound dislocation, geographic fragmentation, and the exhausting struggle to rebuild their shattered lives in eastern provinces and the British Columbia interior. However, by 1947, a crucial turning point arrived. Emerging from the trauma of internment and dispossession, a renewed sense of security, achievement, and political determination began to take root within the community, driven largely by the Canadian-born Nisei generation. This renewed confidence culminated in the formation of the National Japanese Canadian Citizens Association (NJCCA) during a conference in Toronto in September 1947. Establishing a unified national headquarters

and appointing a full-time executive secretary, George Tanaka, the NJCCA signalled that Japanese Canadians were finally prepared to mount a coordinated, national attack against the lingering inequities and decades of anti-Japanese legislative measures. The organization's constitution pledged to undertake collective action to improve the political, social, moral, and economic welfare of Canadians of Japanese ancestry, striving for a true democratic order in which fundamental civil rights and liberties would be accorded to all citizens.

The newly formed NJCCA faced its first major trial in early 1948, stemming from a hostile, regressive move by the provincial government of British Columbia. On January 21, 1948, the British Columbia Department of Lands and Forests abruptly announced that Japanese Canadians would once again be banned from working on Crown timber lands. This discriminatory ban was rooted in the archaic B.C. Crown Timber Act, originally legislated in 1913, legally prohibited Asian employment on these public lands. During the intense wartime production demands of 1943, the federal government had temporarily suspended this racist legislation to alleviate severe Labour shortages in the province's logging and sawmill industries. However, with the lapsing of those federal wartime regulations, the provincial government of Premier Byron Johnson sought to quietly re-institute the ban. For the Japanese Canadian community, this was a devastating blow. It struck directly at the principal means of livelihood for those who had remained in the province, threatening at least 800 Nisei and Issei forest workers with immediate unemployment. Furthermore, the companies employing them—primarily small logging operations and sawmills in the Labour-starved interior of the province—faced the very real prospect of bankruptcy if they were forced to dismiss their skilled Japanese Canadian workforce suddenly.

In stark contrast to the pre-war era, when Japanese Canadians fought such exclusionary measures largely in isolation and faced a uniformly hostile white public, the 1948 ban triggered a massive, coordinated, and multi-racial backlash. The provincial government, perhaps expecting quiet agreement or at least apathy from the white majority, was taken completely by surprise by the intense vocal opposition that rapidly materialized. Within a matter of mere days, the provincial executive chapter of the JCCA (operating under the NJCCA umbrella) mobilized a flood of briefs, telegrams, and protests directed at the provincial legislature. Crucially, they were not fighting alone. The Vancouver branch of the Canadian Civil Liberties Union publicly condemned the regulation, vehemently protesting the government's action as a cruel "war of attrition" against a minority group that had already suffered immense wartime dispossession. The opposition Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party also threw its political weight behind the protesters, publicly condemning the regulation and seeking to interview the provincial Cabinet to halt the discriminatory measure.

This civil rights push was aggressively bolstered by powerful Labour unions and economic interests, marking a dramatic and historic departure from the traditionally anti-Asian stance of British Columbia's Labour movement. The International Woodworkers of America (IWA) stood in firm solidarity with the Japanese Canadian workers, declaring that any logging owners who dismissed their Japanese employees to comply with the racist regulation would be in direct violation of their union contracts. The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, alongside unions from various other industries, also rallied to support the protesters, demonstrating a profound shift toward working-class solidarity across racial lines. Simultaneously, the logging operators themselves—the very employers of the Japanese Canadians—quickly and strongly protested the ban, both individually and collectively through the Canadian Manufacturers' Association. Faced with severe Labour shortages, these business owners

recognized that the government's racist policy was not only morally bankrupt but economically disastrous for their operations and the province's post-war recovery.

Perhaps the most astonishing development during this intense campaign was the radical transformation of the mainstream press in British Columbia. Newspapers that had historically been voraciously anti-Japanese and had actively fanned the flames of racial hysteria leading up to the 1942 internment now reversed their positions entirely. The press condemned the newly re-instituted timber ban as "an act of deplorable discrimination". The *Vancouver Sun* published a dramatic editorial stating that the remnant of the Japanese population could and should be absorbed into the province's economy, boldly proclaiming, "These Japanese are Ours," and insisting that "British Columbia has long since outgrown this kind of racism. Conditions which prompted racial antagonism have changed since Pearl Harbour.... B.C. must be fair". This unexpected media support was a vivid illustration of the dramatic shift in the general climate of public opinion. British Columbia's political leaders had severely misread the public mood; they were attempting to pander to a racist electorate that, in many ways, no longer existed, or at least was no longer willing to tolerate blatant state-sanctioned economic persecution against a proven, loyal minority.

Faced with this overwhelming, unified front of Japanese Canadian activists, civil liberties advocates, major Labour unions, business operators, and an indignant press, the Government of British Columbia was forced into a rapid and humiliating retreat. In the absence of any corresponding public support for retaining the regulation, the provincial government wisely bowed to the mounting liberal pressure. In just nine days after the initial January announcement, the ban was suspended pending legislative review, and it was officially and permanently lifted on April 21, 1948.

This rapid and total victory for the NJCCA and its allies was a watershed moment in Japanese Canadian history. It successfully discredited British Columbia's traditionally racist employment policies and proved that coordinated, multi-racial political action could defeat institutional discrimination. Furthermore, this triumph over the Crown timber lands ban served as a crucial catalyst for the final dismantling of the *de facto* colour bar in the province. The momentum generated by this civil rights push directly contributed to the federal government granting Japanese Canadians the franchise in June 1948. Recognizing the absolute futility of continuing to deny Japanese Canadians their democratic rights in the face of shifting public tolerance, the B.C. provincial legislature finally extended the provincial vote to Japanese Canadians in the spring of 1949, effectively destroying the legal foundation for all discriminatory laws against the community and ending their era of second-class citizenship.

5. The Redress Campaign (1980s)

Summary

The National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) broke the community's post-war silence to aggressively demand justice. They actively resisted the Mulroney government's attempt to impose a token \$6 million group settlement in 1984. Holding out for a negotiated settlement, they eventually won an official apology, individual compensation, and constitutional safeguards under the 1988 Redress agreement.

Main text

For decades following the end of the Second World War, the Japanese Canadian community endured a profound political and social silence regarding their wartime experiences. Traumatized by their forced uprooting, confinement in detention camps, and the total confiscation of their property, the community internalized a systemic humiliation that historians have likened to the psychological trauma of a rape victim. Having been socialized by earlier leaders to believe that their only path to safety was to be "good, quiet, assimilated Canadians," the second-generation Nisei largely avoided public protest and sought safety through political invisibility. However, by the late 1970s, this protective silence began to shatter. The turning point was catalyzed by the 1977 Centennial celebrations commemorating the first Japanese immigrant to Canada, which allowed fractured communities to gather, openly celebrate their heritage, and publicly discuss the internment era rather than keeping it a hushed family secret. This cultural reawakening was decisively bolstered by pioneering historical revelations, notably Ken Adachi's book *The Enemy That Never Was* and Ann Sunahara's archival discoveries. Utilizing newly declassified government documents, Sunahara definitively proved that senior military and RCMP officials had never viewed Japanese Canadians as a national security threat, demonstrating that the wartime abuses were entirely racially and politically driven by the government. Empowered by these irrefutable facts, a new wave of politically active Nisei and third-generation Sansei revitalized their leadership infrastructure, forming the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) to demand formal justice grounded in human rights rather than charity.

The NAJC's campaign for justice faced a critical internal and external test in 1984 when Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's Conservative government offered a token \$6 million group settlement to resolve the historic injustice. This minimal offer created a severe rift within the Japanese Canadian community. A faction centred in Toronto argued for accepting the government's lump-sum offer, viewing it as a politically realistic outcome and fearing a racist backlash against Japanese Canadians if they demanded more. However, the NAJC, led by President Art Miki, fiercely resisted this token proposal. Miki and the NAJC leadership viewed the \$6 million offer as a direct continuation of the paternalistic wartime attitude that Japanese Canadians were a weak, amorphous minority group upon whom a settlement could simply be arbitrarily imposed. To the NAJC, the democratic process of achieving justice was just as important as the redress itself; they adamantly held out for a negotiated settlement—not an imposed one—that included individual monetary compensation to formally acknowledge that the human rights of specific individuals had been grossly violated.

Recognizing that achieving a negotiated settlement required the overwhelming support of the Canadian public, the NAJC launched an intensive, multi-year educational and political campaign between 1984 and 1988. They relentlessly lobbied the government, petitioned ethnic and human rights groups, and distributed compelling materials that ranged from emotional personal narratives to cold, academic studies. Among these was Joy Kogawa's bestselling novel *Obasan*, which vicariously placed thousands of ordinary Canadians inside the harrowing internment experience. At the other end of the spectrum, the NAJC commissioned the respected accounting firm Price Waterhouse to conduct a comprehensive study on the community's wartime economic losses. The resulting report revealed that the wartime confiscation of their property had cost Japanese Canadians a staggering \$443 million in 1986 dollars. These advocacy efforts profoundly shifted public opinion; by 1986, national polls indicated that 63 percent of Canadians supported redress and 45 percent favoured individual compensation. Despite this

swelling public support, the Mulroney government initially remained stubborn, refusing to consider anything beyond a lump-sum group settlement.

The turning tide in Canada was concurrently accelerated by the successful redress campaign of the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL) in the United States. Following a congressional commission's unanimous condemnation of the Japanese American internment, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Civil Liberties Act of 1987, granting \$20,000 in individual compensation to survivors. In addition to demanding monetary compensation, the NAJC placed immense importance on constitutional safeguards to ensure that such state-sponsored repression could never happen to another minority group. In 1987, the Mulroney government introduced the Emergencies Act to replace the draconian War Measures Act, the sweeping legislation that had enabled the wartime abuses. The NAJC's legal committee, recognizing that the proposed bill still possessed dangerous loopholes permitting secret Orders-in-Council, petitioned to appear before the Legislative Committee. On March 15, 1988, Roy Miki and Ann Sunahara successfully demonstrated to lawmakers how the injustices inflicted upon Japanese Canadians could theoretically be repeated under the draft legislation, forcing the government to listen carefully and address these fundamental civil rights vulnerabilities.

The momentum of the Redress Campaign reached a critical climax in the spring and summer of 1988. On April 14, the NAJC held a highly publicized redress rally on Parliament Hill, which was unexpectedly attended by Gerry Weiner, the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, who offered a ray of hope for reopening direct negotiations. The political pressure mounted significantly when U.S. President Ronald Reagan formally signed the American Redress Bill into law on August 10, 1988. Aware that the NAJC was planning a major press conference in Ottawa, the federal government finally recommenced serious discussions in late August. Negotiations shifted to Montreal, where Lucien Bouchard, a Minister of State and close confidant of Prime Minister Mulroney, took charge. The government conceded to the principle of individual compensation, leaving only the exact amounts and non-monetary components to be finalized. After an exhausting 17-hour negotiation session on August 27, 1988, an official agreement was finally reached between the NAJC and the federal government.

On September 22, 1988, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney rose in the House of Commons to announce the historic Redress agreement. Formally acknowledging the wartime wrongs committed against the Japanese Canadian community, Mulroney detailed a comprehensive, negotiated settlement. The agreement provided an official apology and \$21,000 in individual compensation to each survivor who had been directly wronged and was alive on the date of the agreement. Furthermore, the settlement included a \$12 million community fund to help rebuild the infrastructure of the destroyed community, legal pardons for those wrongfully convicted of disobeying the discriminatory orders under the War Measures Act, and the restoration of Canadian citizenship for those who had been wrongfully deported to Japan in 1946 and their descendants. It also allocated \$24 million to establish the Canadian Race Relations Foundation to combat racism in Canada. Ultimately, by breaking their decades-long silence and holding out for a negotiated settlement that empowered the victims, the NAJC not only secured justice for Japanese Canadians but set a profound national precedent, proving that a democratic society must acknowledge and correct its past abuses of power to guarantee an equitable future for all citizens.

6. BC Redress and the Japanese Canadian Legacies Society (2022)

Summary

Following decades of resistance against systemic racism and wartime internment, the BC Redress campaign reached a historic milestone on May 21, 2022. The BC Government announced a \$100 million commitment to address historical wrongs using a framework developed under the National Association of Japanese Canadians. To oversee this funding, the Japanese Canadian Legacies Society (JCLS) was incorporated in June 2022. Led by CEO Susanne Tabata, the JCLS implements legacy initiatives across six pillars: monuments, education, seniors' wellness, community, heritage, and anti-racism. The JCLS plans to complete its mandate and wind down by 2028.

Main text

I cannot expand the report to 1,000 words, as the provided source material is extremely brief and does not contain enough information to reach that length without fabricating details. However, I have expanded the report as comprehensively as possible based on the provided text.

The Historic Announcement and Apology: On May 21, 2022, the government of British Columbia made a landmark announcement to address the historical injustices inflicted upon the Japanese Canadian community before, during, and after the Second World War. Former BC Premier John Horgan delivered the historic news at the Steveston Martial Arts Centre, surrounded by Japanese Canadian community witnesses who had actively contributed to the consultation process. During the event, Premier Horgan explicitly acknowledged the deep trauma and hardships caused by the provincial government's past actions and inactions, emphasizing that healing these historical wounds is a long and ongoing process. He stressed the profound importance of learning from past mistakes, acknowledging historical injustices, and ensuring that no power or persuasion deters the protection of human rights and the defence of all citizens.

The BC Redress Framework and Funding Breakdown. The foundation of this historic announcement was the BC Redress historical wrongs framework, which was developed between 2020 and 2022 under the auspices of the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC). Led by BC Redress Project Director Susanne Tabata, the framework secured a **\$100 million commitment** from the provincial government to fund legacy initiatives across six specific pillars: Monument, Education, Seniors Health and Wellness, Community and Culture, Heritage Restoration, and Anti-racism.

The distribution of these funds occurred in phased grants. In September and October of 2022, the government issued two grants totalling \$62 million to address predetermined initiatives in education, heritage, seniors' health and wellness, and community and culture. Subsequently, in March 2024, an additional \$18.7 million grant was awarded to establish a second community fund. The remaining balance of the \$100 million commitment is held by the Province of BC, which is working collaboratively with community leaders to develop the Japanese Canadian Monument Park located in Victoria.

The Japanese Canadian Legacies Society (JCLS) To oversee the implementation of the BC Redress framework and manage the legacy funding, the **Japanese Canadian Legacies Society (JCLS)** was officially incorporated on June 29, 2022. The JCLS operates under a mandate of dual accountability, answering to both the British Columbia government and the Japanese Canadian community. The organization is guided by a Board of Directors that includes Paul Kariya as President, Larry Okada as Treasurer, Brian Tsuji as Secretary, alongside board members Karen Nishi, Fred Yada, and Les Kojima,

who serves as the representative for the NAJC. Susanne Tabata, the founder and former BC Redress Project Director, serves as the society's Chief Executive Officer.

Looking Forward and Honouring Elders All the legacy initiatives undertaken by the JCLS are fundamentally designed to honour Japanese Canadian elders, both past and present. The society also acknowledges that this vital work is being carried out on the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples. Moving forward, the JCLS continues to implement its programs across its six core pillars and intends to eventually fulfill its mandate, with plans to begin the organization's wind-down process in 2028.

In British Columbia, where most Japanese people have settled since the Meiji era, Japanese people have faced systematic racial discrimination, restrictions on their choice of occupation, and limitations on their human rights as Canadians. With the outbreak of the Pacific War, anti-Japanese politicians, organizations and newspapers in British Columbia demanded that the federal government implement a policy to ultimately expel Japanese Canadians from the province. It was British Columbia that had the greatest impact on the physical, financial and psychological harm suffered by Japanese Canadians before, during and after the war. The fact that Japanese Canadians were not satisfied merely with the resolution of the compensation issue with the Canadian federal government in 1988, but also sought to resolve it with the British Columbia government, was the result of their efforts to bring closure to an important chapter in Japanese Canadian history.