

16 Colonel Eric S. E. Swayne, Governor of British Honduras
to A. Collet, Administrator, British Honduras

Copy.

~~Dec. 20th. 1908.~~

Vernon.B.C. , 20, December, 1908

Dear Mr Collet,

Before my arrival in Canada the Mayor of Vancouver had called a meeting to discuss the Asiatic question at the instance of the Anti-Asiatic Society. Some injudicious speeches were made and gave rise to the feeling amongst the better class Hindus, who were gaining big wages, that forcible deportation would be attempted. Then it was arranged that delegates should go to Belize, the election was just being decided, and the political parties being intent on capturing the Anti-Asiatic labour votes, at once gave out in the Press that it was proposed to deport 1000. Now in British Columbia of the 2500 natives of India present there are over 1000 Sikhs and other Hindus whose savings average 35 dollars a month, or total, say over 35,000 dollars a month. All these have come to Canada leaving their families behind in India and with the object of saving enough in 5 years to return to

India and release their farms from mortgages or buy others. Many are sawyers and some are old soldiers. There were batches of men who arrived in a destitute condition, they were of inferior physique and followed in the wake of the bigger wage-earners. The former last winter roamed about the streets pinched by the cold and appealing to the sympathies of the white man. There was great depression in trade and it was anticipated that this winter some 1500 Hindus, in addition to a large number of white men, would be out of employment and the case was strongly represented to Ottawa, and Govt. was asked to provide against this danger. I do

not think the Govt.officials ever desired to deport the we'll to do, but nevertheless the feeling grew amongst all the Hindus that a strong attempt was being made to remove them to Honduras and they eventually formed a labour Union to prevent it. In the meantime the financial difficulties resulting from the American depression cleared up - mills were re-started and a revival of business took place, and thus the unemployed whites and Hindus got work. The Sikh labour union was therefore easily able to arrange to provide funds to maintain the few members who were out of work, and at the same time stories were spread about that in British Honduras the condition of our old coolies was miserable in the extreme, that water was sold to them absorbing a considerable part of their pay, and that Yellow Fever and mosquitos had possession of the country. Moreover the distance from India was much greater than Canada.

The real reason for the crusade against the movement was that the community as a whole was making very big wages - 4 or 5 times what they could hope to get in British Honduras. They had not gone out of India to settle, but with the sole object of saving enough money to return as quickly as possible, and no grant of land in British Honduras could therefore have tempted them. The soldier class, to whom I offered 20 dollars rising to 40 dollars a month in our police (12 men) were getting 45 to 60 dollars a month ^{clear} here, after paying their keep, and it was not likely therefore they would be attracted. The cold of the Punjaub in winter is as severe as the mild climate of Vancouver, and the winter here therefore did not deter them.

Immediately I arrived in Canada I tried to dissipate the idea that there would be any compulsion,

but on getting to Vancouver, I found that the authorities there could not put me into touch with any unemployed, and my private efforts only discovered 3, who were at the same time allowanced by their employed brethren. I was told there might be some in the districts at Vernon and at Nelson, and so I arranged to go there, but my enquiries showed that Hindus are sought after in the fruit orchards and very few if any are out of work - there were none here at Vernon. In the summer the work is regular and ~~th~~ this demand for labour in the winter is therefore a good indication that these men will be employed in the summer.

I duly received your letter re the embarrasments ~~th~~ that might be caused by any attempt to alter the labour laws, and I have just received a telegram from India fully dealing with other difficulties, which however, as an old Indian officer I had fully foreseen.

As the men will not be coming (and please notify this as soon as possible so as to cause as little disappointment to planters who have been deferring hiring as possible) no question arises.

I am arranging that in case of any Hindus becoming destitute, selected men, (agriculturalists) passed by a doctor, may be, after previous communication with us, got together in batches of 25 to 50 at a time and sent to us.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier assured me, after I had had an opportunity of putting the case fully before him, that Canada would bear part of the expense, and I therefore fear no financial difficulty bearing in mind the offer made by the Colony to contribute 30 dollars a head.

I go from here to Nelson so as to leave no stone unturned and thence to Ottawa to report, and so on direct to British Honduras. One good result of my visit is that the Hindu question in B.C. is solved as far as those

now in the country go. The Sikh community must be held to it to keep indigent Hindus off the streets, and this will assuage, as it has in fact already done, white labour feeling - as it is now moreover hoped that India will limit the number of incoming Hindus.

Apart from the industrial question on the Pacific Coast as between Whites and Asiatics there is no reason why these Hindus should not do very good work here. Many mills speak strongly in favour of the better class amongst them, and it is to the Asiatics in Vancouver that the present stage of activity of the mills and allied industries must be chiefly ascribed. The railways want them badly as development is hampered by the grip of the Trades Unions. Please make full use of this letter.

Yours truly,

(sd) E. J. E. Swayne.