

A CALL FOR CANADIAN JUSTICE

STATEMENT OF CASE.

About 4,500 Hindustanis are now resident in British Columbia, the great majority of whom are Sikhs. Almost all of these came to Canada between 1904 and 1908, and consequently have fulfilled the conditions of Canadian citizenship—they are British subjects who have had their domicile in Canada for three years.

These Sikhs have been asking for years the right, freely accorded to every European immigrant, to bring their wives and families from India, so that they may have the enjoyment of home life, with its attendant safeguards, in their adopted country. So far they have asked in vain, only five wives have been admitted, and these after much effort and litigation. Heavily as this enforced division of families presses on the husbands and fathers in Canada, it presses still more heavily on the weaker ones concerned, the wives and children in India.

THE SIKHS IN INDIA.

There are about 2,000,000 Sikhs in India. They had their origin in the Punjab in the 15th century. Their first leader and teacher, Nanak, was a reformer. He taught there is one God, the unity of mankind and the equality of the sexes. He put aside caste exclusiveness, idol worship and superstition, prohibited the use of wine and other intoxicating liquors, and insisted upon physical and moral purity. The Sikh religion, in the words of Mr. Macauliffe's recent standard work on the subject, "Inculcates loyalty, gratitude, philanthropy, justice, truth, honesty and all the moral and domestic virtues known to the holiest citizens of any country."

Under later leaders the Sikhs became a political as well as a religious power and were noted for their prowess in battle.

Since the annexation of the Punjab in 1849 they have remained ever loyal to Great Britain and have formed a distinguished part of the British Army in India. They saved the British Empire in India at the time of the Mutiny, they have since fought with honour with British troops in Asia and Africa, and now hold an important place among the Indian regiments in active warfare in Europe and the East.

The Sikhs are monogamous and have their own State marriage law in India. Child marriage is not countenanced among them.

They are active in promoting education among their own people. They have a College, Primary and High Schools for both boys and girls and hold an annual Educational Conference. They especially encourage the education of girls. In one at least of their Native States free and compulsory elementary education has been recently introduced.

The Sikhs are noted for their fine physique and independence of spirit. At present their leading occupation is agriculture.

THE SIKHS IN CANADA.

Many of the Sikh community here have seen active service in the Indian Army and wear medals awarded for special bravery.

A large number of them are engaged in agriculture, and of the remainder the majority are employed in railroad construction and maintenance, and in land clearing, factories and lumber mills.

By industry, enterprise and inherent temperate habits they have succeeded in making a competency for themselves. They own their dwelling houses and other property in the cities of Vancouver and Victoria and round about these places. They have invested in British Columbia in real estate and business several millions of dollars.

The authorities in Canada have found them law-abiding and peaceful citizens.

HOW THE DIFFICULTY AROSE.

In 1908 there was put into force by the Canadian Government in the Immigration Department restrictive legislation of such a character that immigration from India was practically stopped. This is shown by the fact that in the following years only 117 have entered Canada according to immigration reports, and many of these only after considerable litigation.

When the Indians had had time to get settled in Canada they naturally, as do other immigrants, began to think of bringing their wives and children to share their lives here. They then found that the restrictive legislation made this impossible. This is shown by the following cases: In 1911 Mr. Hira Singh, an ex-soldier, settled in Canada, went to India to bring his wife and child. On his return he was admitted as a Vancouver resident, but his wife and child were detained under a bond of \$1,000 and were admitted only after three month's litigation, and then as an act of grace.

In 1912, Mr. Bhag Singh, who had served in the 10th Indian Cavalry, and Mr. Balwant Singh, at one time a soldier in the 36th Sikhs Infantry, had similar experiences. They had to give cash bonds for \$2,000 and undergo more than three months of costly litigation before their wives and families were allowed to land in Vancouver and then as an act of grace.

EFFORTS FOR REDRESS.

In 1911 a deputation of three Sikhs and one Canadian approached the Canadian Government with a petition in which it was said "The restriction that most presses and needs very immediate redress, is the regulations that make it impossible for the wives and children of the Hindustanis residing in Canada to join them. The compulsory separation of families is punitive and in itself penal, and can only lawfully be applied to criminals by any civilized nation. It is contrary to every human instinct and jeopardizes the existence of the family life, which is the very foundation of the British Empire as a whole."

In 1912 and 1913 petitions of a like nature were presented to the Canadian Government.

In 1913 three Sikhs were sent as representatives of the Indians in Canada to present their case to the Imperial and Indian Governments, and especially to call attention to the fact that the restrictive legislation of Canada "has the effect of placing the present Indian settlers in great hardship by precluding them from calling over their wives and children."

The Sikhs in British Columbia have given much effort and have spent over \$200,000 in their endeavor to call attention to this disability under which they suffer.

EXPRESSIONS OF OPINION.

Dr. Lawson, in "Daily Colonist," Victoria, 1913, said: "It was my duty to make a thorough physical examination of each emigrant at Hong Kong. . . I refer in particular to the Sikhs, and I am not exaggerating when I say that they were 100 per cent cleaner in their habits and freer from disease than the European steerage passengers I had come in contact with. The Sikhs impressed me as a clean, manly, honest race. I have not yet seen one good reason why they should not be permitted to bring their families in as freely as an European immigrant. Justice, humanity and morality all cry for the removal of the restrictions which prevent the Sikh's enjoyment of home life."

Mrs. I. R. Broad, in "Daily Colonist," 1913: "The patience of the Sikhs as British subjects is being sorely tried. I wonder how many in British Columbia consider how galling it must be to those men who have so often proved that their loyalty is of great importance to the British Empire to see the Chinese and Japanese enjoying home life here while they are debarred from the enjoyment of this great blessing. They understand the objections that can be raised against their coming in large numbers, but why not admit the families of those who are here?"

Elizabeth Ross Grace, Sask., in "Christian Guardian," 1915: "Three times during the past winter a Syrian Mohammedan pedlar has been at my door. . . The presence of these foreigners from an enemy's land has forced to attention questions of our immigration policy. Why are these Turkish Mohammedans allowed to enjoy the privileges of Canada with their wives and children, and our imperial brothers of India excluded? Why should the domiciled Hindus be refused the right of having with them their wives and children?"

"Such questions our Canadian soldiers will have asked them by the soldiers of India."

TIME FOR CHANGE.

That many Canadian citizens are in sympathy with the efforts of the Indians to obtain the right to have their wives and families with them is evident from the expressions of opinion which have appeared from time to time in the Canadian press and elsewhere.

That these would be much more numerous if the case were more generally understood is also certain. So far as the Canadian people are concerned, it is without doubt, a question of "want of thought" rather than "want of care."

This situation which is manifestly antagonistic to Canadian sentiments of humanity and justice and to Christian teaching has arisen in a young and rapidly growing country with large undeveloped resources and the resulting conflict of economic, racial and class interests. A situation once produced tends to become permanent unless some special effort is made to change it. In this case the present time seems particularly opportune for such an effort. Now when India has proved herself not only loyal, but lavishly generous in this crisis of the Empire, when friends and relatives of the Sikhs in Canada are fighting side by side with Canadians in France it would seem peculiarly appropriate for Canada, of her own volition, to give this much petitioned for right to the Indians resident within her borders, if only as a mark of recognition of the comradeship of Canada and India in a great and common cause.

Indeed under the illuminating and clarifying influences of the present war does it seem possible to allow any longer this blot to remain upon the fair name of Canada? Is it a matter to be delayed till the War is over? Has a simple act of justice affecting the moral and home life of an intelligent, God-fearing people to be postponed until we are further shamed into redress by their superior patience and distinguished devotion to the Empire?

WHAT IS NEEDED.

Without doubt the Canadian Government will readily pass the regulations necessary to give the Indians now resident in Canada the right to bring in their wives and families if it is known to be the wish of the Canadian people. Upon such a question—one of justice, morality and Christianity, all Canadians can unite, irrespective of party, religion, class or other differences.

What is needed is that requests be sent to the Dominion Government from representative bodies of all kinds throughout Canada, asking for such legislation. To this end a group within each organization realizing the importance and urgency of the case should at once undertake to disseminate information, and to obtain such an expression of opinion to be forwarded to the Government at the earliest date possible. Will not Christian churches, patriotic, religious, social and other organizations of Canada unite in this object?

Despatches: 1916 May 16-June 30. May 16-June 30, 1916. MS War and Colonial Department and Colonial Office: Hong Kong, Original Correspondence CO 129/433. The National Archives (Kew, United Kingdom). China and the Modern World, link.gale.com/apps/doc/VPLPVX360385591/GDCS?u=gale&sid=bookmark-GDCS&pg=662. Accessed 5 July 2023.