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TOWARD LOCAL ORIENTAL MINORITIES
AND FURTHER IMMIGRATION 1898-1902

BY
MATT GALLO

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THE KOOTENAY PRESS AND ITS ATTITUDES

TOWARD LOCAL ORIENTAL MINORITIES

AND FURTHER IMMIGRATION 1898-1902

Originally, my problem concerning history in the Kootenays was to examine the attitudes that local newspapers took toward local minorities from 1898 to 1902. My research material seemed to cover this time span and this is why I chose this particular period. My research material consisted of six local newspapers: The Silverton Silvertonian, the Slocan Drill, the Nelson Economist, the Sandon Paverbrook, the Grand Forks News, and the New Denver Ledge. Most of my research material was obtained from the editorial sections of these newspapers. Some of it was also found in ads, jokes, and news headlines and stories. Some of it also came from stories or articles quoted from other newspapers inside and outside of the West Kootenay.

I soon began to notice that the minority group with its name commonly in print was the Chinese minority. The Japanese were also to be commonly found in editorial sections. The attitude of the press toward these people was one of dislike. Much abusive writing was directed at these people in many of the papers that I read. Consequently, this paper will study the attitude taken by the press and it will try to establish reasons why the press acted the way it did toward oriental minorities and further immigration into the province and the West Kootenay.

Many of the writers of local papers seemed to dislike oriental immigrants coming into the West Kootenay. The following editorial stresses this point clearly:

The first Chinaman has appeared in Cranbrook, says the Herald of that city, and will act, doubtless, as the forerunner of many of his kind. While only one is to deal with, the citizens of that town had better pitch him out neck and crop. Once let John get a foothold and it is off with the town. The less towns with Chinamen in the better for this province.¹

No one can argue that the press as indicated above was taking a favourable attitude toward Orientals in the West Kootenay, especially new immigrants. Actually, the press, which was the only form of mass media at this time, was trying to mould much

of the public's opinion against Chinese immigration into the West Kootenay. The editors had probably known about the extensive oriental immigration and the reluctance of Chinese minorities to accept North American living standards and customs. Thus, it soon became their policy to close the door of the West Kootenay in the face of oriental newcomers.

First of all, and perhaps the main reason why the editors knocked Chinese and Japanese minorities and further immigration was due to their working presence in various jobs and in mining. It is interesting to note that these papers did not object only to Orientals but to other foreigners before them. The Sandon Payatreak acknowledged the fact that, in 1900, almost every "whiteman's" paper opposed the mine managers' efforts to import aliens to work in Slocan mines.² The same editorial quoted a broadside from the Nelson Economist, the latter complaining that "...the manager of the Payne (mine) has imported Swedes, Italians, Boers, and other foreigners who have no further interest in the country, than acquiring the wealth which is the heritage of British subjects... The Economist cannot and will not endorse the importation of foreigners to absorb the labor and profit that rightly belongs to bonafide British subjects."³ Most papers were soon to inherit the same policy and to apply it to the Chinese and Japanese.

Various West Kootenay newspapers voiced their opinions against the employers such as the Canadian Pacific Railway for employing Chinese workers. In 1896, the New Denver Ledge editor wrote an editorial attacking the latter, as he expected them to have future plans for employing Chinese in the loading and unloading of cars, for doing section work, and for cooking, stewarding, and firing on Slocan steamboats:

...It is to the malign influence of the CPR, that we in this district, in common interest with the rest of the Province stand indebted for the fearful influx of Chinese which is such a curse to British Columbia today....⁴

The editorial continued on to charge that the Federal Government was the tool of the CPR. The editor argued that this was the reason why the B.C. poll tax legislation had been hindered. The editorial furthermore established a cause for what appeared to be a form of B.C. separatism. If B.C. is to be ignored on vital issues, "...we

should be forced to the conclusion that we have entered into a federal compact which has proved one-sided.... It was now a question of divorcing ourselves from an alliance in which we have no fair representation."

Various papers were thus against companies that employed Chinese where white men could be employed. These papers often furthered their opposition against these companies and the Chinese workers, particularly concerning railways and mines, by complimenting those employers who replaced their Chinese workers or discriminated totally against the latter people. In 1900, a Nelson Economist editorial told its readers that a coal mine owner said that he was ready to replace his Chinese miners with white miners. The Economist supported this employer and an advertisement calling for white miners to fill the resulting vacancies appeared in the same edition:

Wanted 500 White Miners And helpers
for the Wellington Extension and Co-
nox Mines to supersede all the Chin-
ese in our mines. Apply at once to
the Managers of the said mines. Wel-
lington Colliery Co., Ltd.⁶

Later, in 1901, a Grand Forks paper congratulated railway promoters for discriminating against Chinese workers. Notice the position of the press toward railways here in contrast to the position taken earlier by the Ledge against the CFR in 1898: "The promoters of the Republic-Grand Forks Railway are to be congratulated upon their stand taken regarding the employment of Chinese on all works on their line. All contracts specifically forbid the employment of Chinese in any capacity."⁷ This was an example of outright discrimination and such practice was supported and encouraged by the local press.

Laundry discrimination was encouraged by the Grand Forks press as well. The Grand Forks News edition of November 2, 1901 encouraged citizens to lend moral and financial support to a non-oriental Laundry because "seventy-five per cent of all monies collected by this institution is paid our merchants for the necessities of life."⁸ The following week a racist advertisement for such a laundry read:

People's Steam
LAUNDRY
White labour only
employed... Quick
work, and clean linen
PATRONIZE A HOME INDUSTRY⁹

An editorial for this same edition explained why the paper favoured the non-Oriental laundry in Grand Forks. The multiplier effect, a basic law of economics, was the general reason. According to the editorial, the whiteman's laundry paid out 600 monthly to its employees who spent their money in Grand Forks. On the other hand, if the Chinese laundries received a whiteman's patronage, the money would be spent at Chinese merchant stores or the surplus would be sent out to China. This was often the big argument by the business class in the West Kootenay as it was in other places where Chinese people settled.

There is also some evidence of anti-Chinese labour excitement nearing the point of violence in the West Kootenay during 1898. The New Denver Ledger editorial of November 17 told of "obnoxious, unwholesome, Mongolians" around Sandon being rustled out of the district, although without violence but resulting in the arrest of two white miners for unlawful assemblage. The paper blamed not the white miners but the employers who gave the Chinese jobs there. At this time, the Slokan was free of Orientals and the paper asserted: "Let it be said that one spot in British Columbia--the Slokan, and the richest of them all--is free from the contaminating influence of the...unwashed sons of China."¹⁰

In labour, then, there appeared to be growing somewhat of a distrust or jealousy toward the Chinese who were "enroaching", as the Grand Forks News put it, upon the whiteman's fields of labour. However, their jealousy increased as the Japanese hit the Province with aggressiveness in the job market. The Grand Forks News complained that if B.C. workers should have to compete with the Japanese, "...then we must begin to figure on paupers and poor-houses."¹¹ The New Denver Ledger had earlier warned the local people about Japanese workers in Coast Canneries: "In a few years the Jap will probably be running for the legislature in this province. If our stock of Imperial reasons keep on increasing he may even reach

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Ottawa."¹² Thus, it seemed there was a fear that the Oriental "classes" would become the leaders of the community and nation due to their ability to work for low wages and to get ahead.

It was common to see an attack by the press of one town against the Chinese of another town. Editorials told of Chinese job stealers in other areas. The Cranbrook Herald, for example, printed an article concerning West Kootenay mine owners importing Italian workers. The article was entitled "Cheap labour-cheap people" and it was reprinted in the New Denver Ledger in 1898. The article complained that all money earned by Italians and Chinese is sent home. The article concluded that "...One white man working at good wages is better for a community than 20 Chinks or Dagoes."¹³ A Grand Forks News editorial attacked Nelson Chinese and complimented the consumer boycott encouraged by the trades and labour council:

Nelson is today the headquarters for a majority of the Chinese in West Kootenay and Yale. It is a distinction that the wholesale city of the Kootenays should not feel proud of; and the recent action of the trades and labour council in placing on the "unfair list" all hotels and saloons that employ Chinese help is but natural. "Self-preservation is the first law of nature!"¹⁴

An interesting change of attitude, at least to Chinese newcomers, was displayed in the Grand Forks area in 1901. On August 24, the News featured an editorial that welcomed people to settle. The paper said that the growth of the city made it a favourable place to settle in contrast to the business stagnation of the province. The editorial said that "...There should be ample room for all newcomers...."¹⁵ However, in October, the paper came out encouraging Government exclusion policies and using the term "yellow and brown plague".¹⁶ It seemed that Grand Forks had had its share of Chinese immigrants, according to the press. This attitude seemed to co-incide with the earlier controversy over unsanitary Chinese laundries. Now it seemed that all newcomers meant everyone but Orientals.

The Chinese laundry controversy in Grand Forks became quite an issue in the autumn of 1901. The Chinese, according to the Grand Forks News were refusing to provide for proper cesspools and other sanitary regulations, even after they were approached by magistrates. This resulted in the press opposing the Chinese who it

described as being an unfavourable "class" in the community:

The Chinese, as a class, are a menace to any town or place which they choose to make their place of abiding and the sooner the people of Grand Forks come to a realization of this fact the better it will be for the community.¹⁷

This editorial not only condemned their unsanitary practice but it labelled the one hundred Grand Forks Chinese as "...almond-eyed devotees of fan-tan and opium."¹⁸ It also mentioned again their sending money home to China. The result of the laundry controversy, according to the paper, was that a bylaw against unsanitary laundries was passed in council, only to be turned down by court on the grounds that it was unconstitutional. The paper, however, continued to push for "...a constitutional law compelling the devotees of fan-tan and opium to observe the most common sanitary practices", which would bring an end to the "disease-breeding incubators".¹⁹

All this agitation against Chinese labourers, unsanitary laundrymen, and money exporters furthered the press' opposition to further Chinese and Japanese immigration. Oriental Exclusion thus became the shout of the West Kootenay Press. In 1900, the Chinese immigration tax was increased from \$50 to \$100 per person. The New Denver Ledger called for \$500 per person.²⁰ In the summer of 1902, when figures were released showing an increase in Chinese immigrants, even with the poll tax, the Slocan Drill pointed out that "British Columbia, as usual got the majority of these undesirables."²¹ The latter paper also complained when a bill to regulate immigration was "thrown down" and that the "Chinese lovers" at Ottawa were not "protecting" B.C. from those "precious Mongolians".²² The Nelson Economist also warned of the extensive oriental immigration. A front page item in April, 1900, described the immigration of "...little brown men Japanese immigrants pouring into the country by the thousands."²³ The article stated that the type of people sent by Japan were her "undesirable citizens" and it concluded that "...we cannot afford to be made the dumping ground for Asia."²⁴ With heavy immigration, the West Kootenay papers were on the lookout for oriental immigrants coming into the West Kootenay. A notice about a new settler appeared in the New Denver Ledger in the summer of 1900 and it read in a joking manner: "...A yellow spot has appeared near

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Slocan City. It cooks at the Chapleau."²⁵ Whether the purpose of this notice was a joke, an attempt to get people to boycott the Chapleau, or an encouragement to hassle the new cook is up for the reader to interpret.

However, amidst all the anti-oriental literature, there were people in B.C. and in the West Kootenay who did not agitate against Orientals. How did the press treat people who showed some liking for the Orientals? The following quotation from the New Denver Ledger seems to answer this question:

No man who stands up in Ottawa and pleads the cause of Canada for the Chinamen is a true friend to the best interests of this great Dominion. He should be herding exiles in Siberia, or thumping Indian slaves in the silver mines of South America. A white-man's country is no place for Chinese boosters.²⁶

The last line borders on clear rascism.

Some politicians in B.C. did not object to Chinese labour. Premier Turner, for example, declined to make any hasty decisions concerning the Chinese immigration and the jobs that they were getting. The result was a front page news item in the Silverton Silvertonian entitled "Turnerism and Chinese":

Premier Turner stated publicly, after the meeting held here Thursday morning, that he did not believe in taking any action toward stopping CHINESE immigration. That British Columbia could not get along without CHINAMEN and that we must have them.²⁷

Notice the emphasis on "Chinese" and "Chinamen" in what seems to be an attempt to make the reader oppose Mr. Turner's statements. According to the rest of the news item, much of this story seemed strongly directed at Turner because the Government had earlier tried to bring Chinese labour into the New Denver area.

Another politician, John McMillan was labelled in a similar manner. The Nelson Economist had a column entitled "From the Capital". A news item of May 2, 1900 concerned Mr. McMillan's campaign journeys on Vancouver Island. Mr. McMillan found that the electorate disagreed with his Chinese views. The news item concluded: "...Be it remembered that on the public platform John McMillan stated that John Chinaman was his brother and was as good as a white man."²⁸

This abusive attitude toward a person who stuck up for the Chinese is an example of rascism at its best.

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The editor of the Nelson Economist showed, however, that a newsman could have some humanitarian spirit toward his Chinese brothers. In December of 1899, this editor complained of boys mistreating a Chinese person by pulling his queue and making life miserable for him. He stated that: "...I am not an admirer of John Chinaman collectively but I must confess it seems to me that he is a harmless fellow in his way and should not be subjected to persistent persecution at the hands of mischievous and vicious boys."²⁹ He goes on to say that "John" has become a citizen and has obeyed the law, therefore he is entitled to the law's protection. This example (although it pokes fun at the Chinese person who was called "John Chinaman") does indicate that at least some writers were not prejudice against the Chinese in that it would interfere with their sticking up for them. I found very few writers reflecting the same attitude as this one.

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the problem concerning the oriental minority and further immigration into the Kootenays, I must conclude that much of the abuse thrown at these minorities were in some cases justified and in some cases not. However, I would have liked to have had more information on the number of Chinese people living in the West Kootenay as well as the names of all the editors and their previous occupations. I also would like to have known who the papers were owned by and the nationality of the people who owned them.

The Chinese and Japanese immigrants into B.C. and the Kootenays were detrimental to the working man's interests. Their presence and continuing immigration into labour areas threatened the capacity of local people to find jobs. The Chinese also sent surplus cash out of the country to China. This money, if earned by local people would probably have been spent here to further the West Kootenay economy. Their laundries in Grand Forks, too, could have been more sanitary. However, I wish to make it clear that I am basing my conclusions thus far

on what the "whiteman's" newspapers were saying. I would certainly like to have read the Chinese point of view in the Kootenays. For that matter, I wonder whether any of the Chinese immigrants could speak or write English. This language barrier would perhaps have held down their chances of assimilating culturally and economically into the system. I also question how unsanitary were the Chinese laundries in Grand Forks. Perhaps the opposition to them was overdone and unnecessary, especially when the Chinese minority was labelled as a menacing class. I feel that much of the opposition to these laundries was an economic problem. The Chinese often undersold other laundries and they sent the surplus cash home. This aggravated the business-minded editors as much as cheap labour affected the working community.

I also question the methods in which the press attacked the oriental minorities. They were racist in their views toward these people, especially when they called them "Chinks" and "Japs" and when they described their immigration as being "the yellow and brown plague". Thus, the problem of extensive oriental immigration and job and wage competition became distorted with frequent racism on the part of the newsmen. The whiteman's opposition to the Chinese practice of sending surplus cash out of the country could be justified. Their opposition to job competitors and unsanitary laundrymen could also be justified. But their racist attitudes toward these people could not in any terms be justified. This is the main area in which I oppose strongly the attitudes taken by local newspapers toward oriental minorities at the turn of the century. The press' case against the minority may have been respectable but ~~the~~ manner of conduct was definitely not.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Editorial in the Silverton Silvertonian, Sat. May 21, 1898.

² Editorial in the Sandon Paystreak, Feb. 3, 1900.

³ Ibid., Feb. 3, 1900.

⁴ Editorial entitled "The Chinese Question" in the New Denver Ledger, Jan. 13, 1898.

- 5 Editorial in the New Denver Ledge, Jan. 13, 1898.
- 6 Advertisement in the Nelson Economist, May 30, 1900, p. 12.
- 7 Editorial in the Grand Forks News, Oct. 12, 1901.
- 8 Editorial in the Grand Forks News, Nov. 2, 1901.
- 9 Advertisement in the Grand Forks News, Nov. 9, 1901.
- 10 Editorial in the New Denver Ledge entitled "Chinese Not Wanted", Nov. 17, 1898.
- 11 Editorial in the Grand Forks News, Oct. 19, 1901.
- 12 Editorial in the New Denver Ledge, May 10, 1900.
- 13 Cranbrook Herald article reprinted in the New Denver Ledge, Nov. 16, 1899.
- 14 Editorial in the Grand Forks News, Oct. 19, 1901, p. 4.
- 15 Editorial in the Grand Forks News, Aug. 24, 1901.
- 16 Editorial in the Grand Forks News, Oct. 19, 1901.
- 17 Editorial in the Grand Forks News, Sept. 28, 1901.
- 18 Ibid., Sept. 28, 1901.
- 19 Ibid., Sept. 28, 1901.
- 20 Editorial in the New Denver Ledge, Thurs. June 14, 1900.
- 21 Editorial in the Slocan Drill, Aug. 1, 1902.
- 22 Editorial in the Slocan Drill, Dec. 19, 1902.
- 23 News item in The Nelson Economist, April 25, 1900, p. 1.
- 24 Ibid., April 2, 1900.
- 25 Notice in the New Denver Ledge, Thurs., June 7, 1900, p. 4.
- 26 Editorial in the New Denver Ledge, July 5, 1900, p. 2.
- 27 News item in the Silverton Silvertonian, Sat. July 3, 1898, p. 1.
- 28 "From the Capital", a column in the Nelson Economist, May 20, 1900, p. 8.
- 29 Editorial in the Nelson Economist, Dec. 27, 1899.

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