

RACE AND REVOLUTION: CANADA'S VICTORIAN LABOUR PRESS AND THE CHINESE IMMIGRATION QUESTION

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Abstract

In the closing years of the Victorian Age, thousands of labourers from China and the Indian subcontinent were imported into Canada to help build the new country's infrastructure. In particular, these workers were employed laying the tracks for the cross country Canadian Pacific Railway. Although most workers professed to be only temporary wards of the state, hundreds if not thousands chose to stay in the Pacific Northwest and establish communities. This sense of permanence brought a strong reaction from Canadian labour unions most of whom adopted official policies demanding that Chinese and Asian labourers be deported from the country. The depth of their opposition appeared in many forms in the Canadian labour press of the period. It is here that one can sense precisely how emotional, irrational and racist the commentary was. The labour community, which pictured itself as the agent of reform in the country turned violently reactionary when confronted with this issue. The vitriolic racism that appears in journal after journal has done much to diminish the sense of reform to which labour subscribed in that period.

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Illusion and Reality: Some Considerations

The eternal quest for perfection, assuming that it exists, has been marked by a continuing conflict between those who benefit from any given social or economic regime and those who do not. Throughout the course of human history, from the ancient Greeks and Romans to more contemporary ideological and political confrontations, minorities of various descriptions have sought the right to be treated as equals. In the past four decades, both European and North American societies have witnessed battles based on gender, physical attributes, sexual preference and of course race, the discourse which has so dominated American society.

Much can be implied from the language of dissent no matter what the source. As scholars who deal with language have learned, minority politics have been flavoured by both new words and the re-invention of the old. For example, the word "gay" which now denotes a person who favours same sex relationships has changed significantly in meaning and image from the word that described the high spirits of the decade that closed the nineteenth century. Descendants of slaves in the United States who now prefer to be identified as "African Americans" were at one time accepting of the designation "Negro." No more.

As clear as this may seem, it presents concrete difficulties to the historian looking at the past through contemporary glasses. What may constitute sexism, racism and homophobia in one phase of the human experience might just be revolutionary in another. Yet, too often do societies have a tendency to dismiss the more disagreeable aspects of the past because no convenient formula can be found to explain blatantly prejudicial behaviour by those once regarded as saints. In every respect the rebellious nature of the late Victorian labour movement in Canada presents this challenge. In their relationship to what are now called visible minorities, the labour leaders of the past who pressed for shortened working days, the end of child labour, technical schooling, benefit programs, minimum wages and a host of other socially rewarding initiatives, were, when it came to minorities in their midst, rampant racists. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the official attitude of organised labour toward Chinese immigrants in both Canada and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The objective of this study is not to explore ground already sufficiently trodden although some context will be necessary. The Chinese epoch is well known in North American history. Instead, the initiative will be to explore the mind of the Victorian Caucasian worker and how that expressed itself in the world of labour journalism prior to the First World War. It is a study of consciousness and as a consequence, the investigation must proceed with care, for consciousness and reality may not necessarily be one and the same thing nor may not be the same thing in different historical periods. As James Carey has pointed out:

When we study the history of journalism we are principally studying a way in which men in the past have grasped reality. ... We are trying to root out a portion of the history of consciousness. Journalism as a cultural form is not fixed and unchanging. Journalism has changed as it has reflected and reconstituted human consciousness. Journalism not only reveals the structure of feeling of previous eras, it is the structure of feeling of past eras or at least significant portions of it (Carey 1974, 5).

So, a significant question remains. Why did Canadian organised labour not heed Marx's call for an international brotherhood of working people to challenge the power of industrial capital? An examination of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Canadian labour press will provide significant clues.

One of the fatal flaws in Marx's analysis of the potential of working class collective behaviour was the inability to recognise the power of self-interest. As Neil Smelser pointed out in the early 1960's for any form of collective behaviour to succeed, it must recognise that all those participating in group activity must surrender their individual goals to the greater good (Smelser 1962, 6). In late 19th and early 20th century Canada, the prospect of starvation, disease and early death quite regularly superceded interest in any form of collective behaviour such as union activity. Smelser also argued that any form of collective behaviour in which those who are participating cannot personally contact their colleagues must have a sophisticated and working form of communication, something also noted by Canadian communications theorist Harold Innis (1972, 5). This was the intent of the Canadian labour press but as will be seen later, success was sporadic at best.

A clear and simple fact of life in late Victorian Canada was that organised labour and its journalists did not see immigrant workers as part and parcel of what could be a greater good or in essence as members of the same class. While industrialists on both sides of the 49th parallel continued to rape the land and its resources without mercy and treat its workers as one notch above slaves, the one and only class capable of massing the forces to oppose such actions remained divided, not by class but by race. As the political philosopher Georg Lukacs pointed out:

For a class to be ripe for hegemony means that its interests and consciousness enable it to organize the whole of society in accordance with those interests. The crucial question in every class struggle is this: which class possesses this capacity and this consciousness at the decisive moment? (Lukacs 1971, 52)

This is an important question indeed. Along with Lukacs's observations, one more must be added to the mix. If and when any form of hegemony should occur, will the collective action that results be one which moves the class forward or will it seek sanctuary in the practices of the past? When E. P. Thompson analyzed the behaviour of English workers who took part in food riots in the late eighteenth century, he noted that it is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth century crowd action some legitimizing notion. This simply means that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community (Thompson 1971, 78).

Thompson's observations mean that it is difficult if not impossible to dismiss the probability that organisations that see themselves dedicated to reform might contain elements which reflect the opposite point of view and might, in fact depending on the issue, be quite reactionary. In the Canadian sense this meant deference to a higher power, one by the benefit of birth or brains, which had the right to rule. This particular strain of political ideology known as Tory Jacobinism to some was imported from the United States to Canada during and following the American War of Independence (Resnick 1990, 42). It was a philosophy that fit in well with rising socialist movements and in many ways, defined the secondary place of labour in the post Confederation economy. It did not necessarily produce any form

of consensus however on state formation between ruler and ruled. In fact, it produced just the opposite.

The Rise of the Labour Press

The first major union movement in Canada was the Philadelphia based Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labour. They landed in the country's industrial heartland stretching along the north shores of Lakes Erie and Ontario travelling the St. Lawrence River to the sea in 1869. By 1886-87 they had at least 158 Assemblies in Canada with membership exceeding 1,200. Growth was rapid. By 1887, Montreal alone had 38 Assemblies with 2,000 members. Although concentrated in the industrial corridors of Ontario and Quebec there were isolated assemblies in Manitoba and British Columbia. It was the Knights who gave birth to the major labour press in Canada, but they were not the first unionists to become involved in journalism. That honour fell to striking printers in Toronto in 1872.

Following the organizing success of the Knights of Labour, Canada's political elite watched nervously as the working class movement began to grow. When the International Typographers' Union struck the *Toronto Globe* in 1872, the Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald seized the moment to recruit labour support for his Liberal-Conservative party. The *Toronto Globe* was owned and published by Macdonald's chief rival, George Brown who was also the head of the federal Reform Party. When Brown brought sedition charges against the printers, arguing that the law forbade the organisation of trades unions, Macdonald passed the country's first legislation legalizing unions. He also funded the founding of the nation's first weekly trades union journal, the *Ontario Workman* (Lipton 1968, 54-70). Crippled by a worldwide depression, the *Ontario Workman* finally succumbed to economic reality in 1874.

From 1880 onward, the transformation from a political to a market economy press was rapid and effective. By the turn of the century, the commercialisation of the Canadian press was an undeniable fact of life. The Canadian newspaper "industry" so to speak was dominated by powerful publishers intent on expressing their specific worldviews while simultaneously supporting them with advertising supplements. Like George Brown, founder of the *Toronto Globe*, most publishers held the common view that the most powerful agenda of the daily press was to educate readers in the principles of democratic citizenship, of course from the point of view held by the publishers (Sotiron 1997, 10-11). On the contrary, in theory at least, Philip Foner has observed, "the press has always been a vital force in spreading or suppressing knowledge" (Foner 1982, 86). And, as far as organised labour was concerned, the daily press suppressed far more than it revealed especially when working class concerns became vital issues to unionists.

The dispossessed have always sought to have their voices heard and with the advent of new technologies such as the telegraph and high capacity printing presses combined with a general increase in the level of education this became more of a possibility. North American working class activists were not that far removed from European experiences like those of the Chartists in early Victorian Britain. Names such as those of the pamphleteer William Cobbett and the socialist journalist James (Bronterre) O'Brien were certainly familiar to Canadian working class activists many of whom were recently arrived British immigrants. It is highly likely that a signifi-

cant number of them would have read O'Brien's weekly newsheet *Destructive* in which the journalist actively discussed the formation of a working class Radical theory of rule (Thompson 1968, 800-01).

Whether the ideas of Cobbett, O'Brien and their soul mates were spread by word of mouth or the printed page, the concept that a press was central to both institutional and dissident cultures had taken hold by the time Britain passed its first significant electoral reform legislation in 1832. Throughout the remainder of the Victorian age, the dissident presses that popped up on a regular basis and failed in many cases just as quickly were still instrumental in articulating the grievances of those who had no other voice. North America would prove to be no different and when the campaigns began against the importation and exploitation of Chinese labourers in both Canada and the United States, the working class press was at the head of the parade.

In the United States, the "rise of a dissident press created by American labourers coincided with the period of democratic revolution credited to Andrew Jackson, the first self-made man to ascend to the presidency" (Streitmatter 2001, 4). The involvement of the press reached its peak when in 1886-1887, Charles H. Kerr founded his publishing company in Chicago. Although it was the voice of one branch of Unitarianism at its birth, by the turn of the century, the Kerr Company was the focal point of leftist and dissident publishing in the United States (Ruff 1997, 32). Its influence extended into Canada. Canadian labourers were growing up in a similar climate. Not only were they encouraged by the legalisation of the union movement in 1872 and the continued support of the Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, their old foes such as the organised clergy were being challenged by secular science, a consequence of the controversy over Charles Darwin's publication *On The Origin Of Species* (Cook 1985, 9).

Unionists across the country were convinced that all the old order needed was a polite shove in the right direction and it would come tumbling down. Labour journalism was seen to be a critical player in the formation of a consistent, hegemonic working class culture, one which could clearly articulate the core needs of the movement. Unfortunately, the leaders at the top of the labour movement were often elites within their own ranks and quite often did not speak the language of the shop floor. Typical was a bitter Phillips Thompson, a Toronto based radical journalist who closed his eleven-month-old *Labor Advocate* in 1891 citing lack of union support for his efforts (*The Labor Advocate*, 25 September, 1891). However, when it came to the question of Chinese immigration and labour, the journalist and the worker spoke the same language.

In May of 1881, a colourful, tobacco chewing, journalistic eccentric named E. E. Sheppard launched the *Toronto News*. It was to be the evening edition of the Liberal-Conservative newspaper the *Toronto Mail*. Sheppard teamed up with well-known local radicals, not the least of which was the aforementioned Phillips Thompson. Although the newspaper was not a labour journal in the strictest sense, it carried a regular column composed by local unionists in the Knights of Labour Assemblies. But the main thrust of the *Toronto News* was local events including gossip columns and support for American style republicanism. His target audience was the growing urban proletariat in the Toronto-Hamilton corridor. In spite of Sheppard's seemingly boundless imagination for attracting readers, the news-

paper was not a financial success, which eventually resulted in the editor losing control of his journal in 1887 (Rutherford 1982, 54-56).

On March 24, 1883, the Knights of Labour delivered the first edition of its Hamilton-based weekly the *Labor Union*. On August 11, 1883, it changed its name to the *Palladium of Labor*. An ill-fated decision to take the newspaper daily resulted in total failure and final collapse in 1886. In London, Ontario a tin smith by the name of Joseph Marks founded the *Industrial Banner* in 1892. Published as a monthly, it would prove to be the most durable of all the Victorian labour journals, lasting until 1922. In 1898, a religious revisionist George Wrigley founded the Toronto based journal *Citizen and Country*. Eventually the newspaper was moved to Western Canada where it became known as the *Western Clarion* and the voice of the Western Federation of Miners in British Columbia.

Lest one be misled, this is only a partial accounting of the labour press in Victorian Canada. Along with monetary dissidents, agricultural reformers, religious revisionists, single taxers and a host of other reform movements, the labour press published no less than one hundred and thirty-three newspapers, some of whom are addressed in the following discussion of Chinese immigration and Canadian labour (Spencer 1990, 48-94).

The Chinese and Canadian Labour

It can be argued with some validity that the collision between Chinese immigrants and organised labour started with the California gold rush in 1849. Swiftly, the Chinese moved beyond California, into the interior and into southern British Columbia in Canada. Initially these transient workers were welcomed into the new towns and villages that sprang up because of the gold rush (Lee 2003, 25). They provided cheap, reliable and subservient labour for mine owners, forestry companies, vineyards and market garden farms to name just a few. In Canada, the federal government, attempting to persuade the colony of British Columbia to join the new Confederation of 1867, promised to link the cities of Central Canada with the new province by rail. This enormous and expensive engineering feat would require many hands of manual labour. The Chinese fit the bill. To this very day, Canadians in small towns and villages across the nation believe that if a Chinese restaurant exists on the main street, at one point that the owners' ancestors laid tracks on the outskirts of town.

American and Canadian capitalists alike began to depend on the importation of labour from China during the second half of the nineteenth century. In most cases, those immigrants coming to North America, to the Golden Mountain as they called it, had no intention of staying. Their mission was to earn as much as possible and take their largesse back home for a better life in the Far East. As a consequence, the free movement of labour became a priority not only in North America but in China itself. In 1867, the Chinese government approached the American ambassador and asked him to head a Chinese delegation to both the United States and Europe with a view to making the flow of human traffic simpler. Up until that point, China had stiffly resisted any thought of emigration by its citizens. Anson Burlingame agreed to the request heading a mission of two Chinese representatives and himself. His case was successful and what was to become known as the Burlingame Treaty was signed in Washington in the summer of 1868.

The treaty was in reality a free trade agreement involving people as opposed to goods. The treaty specified that:

the inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance, and also the mutual advantage of the free migration and emigration of their citizens and subjects respectively, for purposes of curiosity, of trade, or as permanent residents ([Http://immigrants.harpweek.com/ChineseAmericans/2KeyIssues/Burlingame Treaty 1868](http://immigrants.harpweek.com/ChineseAmericans/2KeyIssues/Burlingame Treaty 1868)).

The treaty also contained clauses that were intended to protect Chinese living in the United States from discrimination of any kind. As it will be shown, the treaty was ineffective in this respect.

Not only were American and Canadian capitalists eager to recruit Chinese labour, they were also very aware of the fact that a huge marketplace of nearly 400 million persons lived just an ocean away. When F.A. Bee an attorney in British Columbia, who often represented employer interests, testified before the 1885 government commission investigating Chinese labour, he confessed that the real purpose of the Burlingame Treaty was to open the Chinese market to U.S. and Canadian based merchant marine companies (Royal Commission 1885, 181). In no respects were North American employers bound by any humanitarian considerations.

The free flow of humanity has caused grief around the world from time eternal even when those who came had just as much in common as those who were doing the receiving. That could not be said for an open door policy for a group of people whose race and value system had nothing in common with the North America of the Victorian age. Collisions were inevitable and on the sixth of May 1882, the American government moved to close the door. On that day, Edward K. Valentine, a Republican congressman from Nebraska rose in the House to verbally justify why America no longer wanted these immigrants. He reiterated, "in order to protect our labouring classes the gate must be closed" (Lee 2003, 30). Congress passed the Exclusion Act. British Columbia was soon to follow.

The Chinese were the first Asians to arrive in Southern British Columbia just about the same time as the soon-to-be-province was given colonial status within the British Empire. When the Burlingame Treaty relaxed the conditions for Chinese wishing to leave their homeland, the flow of human traffic became a direct connection between Asia and British Columbia. At the peak of the California gold rush, it was estimated that there were about 4,000 Chinese in the colony. However, when riches were still being made to the south, this number declined to about 1,500 in 1870.

Although historian Patricia Roy has noted, immigration figures should be treated carefully, there was a serious wave of Chinese immigration into southern British Columbia in the 1880s. According to Roy there were about 17,000 Chinese immigrants, many of whom were working on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. But, by 1891, the Chinese population had declined to 8,910. Nonetheless, it was apparent that a significant number of these people liked life in the Golden Mountain and were not prepared to leave. Just five years later, another wave of immigration came to the west coast. By 1911, the Chinese accounted for 27,774 persons (Roy 1989, x-xi).

Permanent residents soon became small time capitalists. Settling into a district in Vancouver which became known as Chinatown, the population soon began erecting solid brick buildings to house new businesses for the “manufacture of cigars, tinware, clothes and shoes” (Roy 1989, 39). Outside the urban boundaries, they worked in the gold mines, the Fraser River salmon canneries, Vancouver Island coal mines and in a number of service occupations. Rumours floated around Anglo-Saxon communities that the Chinese had taken over both the shoe making and cigar manufacturing industries in California. Of course the suggestion was meant to spread the fear that it was only a matter of time before it would occur in British Columbia (Roy 1989, 39).

In step with American initiatives, the Government of British Columbia attempted to restrict the activity of Chinese in the colony. Responding to rumours that the Chinese were gifted at tax avoidance, the new provincial government passed legislation exempting the Chinese from provincial taxes. Instead, they were required to purchase a license for thirty dollars every six months. This was later reduced to ten dollars for every three months. Failure to hold a license could result in a loss of an individual’s property. Needless to say, the Chinese were strongly opposed to the legislation. They reacted by reducing all contact with whites, which included service work in white homes. Eventually the legislation was declared beyond the legal jurisdiction of the province and the federal government used its constitutional powers of disallowance to reject the legislation (Roy 1989, 39).

In 1884, the provincial government tried once more to restrict Chinese endeavours with the Chinese Population Regulation Bill. It too was disallowed by the federal government, beginning a cat and mouse game between the two levels of government that lasted well into the twentieth century. Eventually, the federal government passed its own legislation in 1884, which covered all of the country. Ships entering Canada could have only one Chinese immigrant for each 50 tons of capacity. Chinese leaving the country had to pay a \$50 head tax, a sum which faced continual re-evaluation and implementation. In 1891, the province wanted the head tax increased to \$100. It took another ten years but on January 1901, the federal government agreed that one hundred dollars was an ideal sum (Roy 1989).

So, just what was so reprehensible about the Chinese presence in Canada, and what motivated the Canadian labour press to involve itself in such an inhumane and racist undertaking by advocating the elimination and deportation of Chinese Canadians? The words of the American Anti-Chinese Union, which also had a Canadian counterpart are revealing:

Chinese labor has a tendency to degrade the dignity of labor, the laboring man disliking to work beside a Chinaman feeling that he is not his social equal; it has to a certain extent, the same tendency that slave labor had in the south formerly – being dishonorable labor because it was not free labor (Royal Commission 1885, 233).

Evidence: The Role of the Press

When the Canadian federal government convened its investigative commission to look into the question of Chinese immigration in Canada, it heard numerous assertions regarding the behaviour of the alien in Canadian life. Although by

no means comprehensive, the major list contained no less than thirty-two categories by which judgment could be cast. They were agitation, assassination, assimilation, character, Christianity, civilization, contagious diseases, contracts, coolies, crime, development of country, domestic servants, education, employments, exclusion, feeling, franchise, gambling, immigration, inhumanity, labour, leprosy, morality, opium smoking, prostitution, public opinion, sanitation, secret tribunals, small pox, sodomy, syphilis and women. Needless to say, not one of these categories was mutually exclusive from any of the others. Leprosy was certainly a disease by any sense of the imagination and the actions of persons in other categories could certainly be grouped under issues about civilization. Not to miss a beat, the Canadian labour press touched on virtually every one of these subject matters in one form or another to make its case that Chinese immigrants had no legitimate place in Canadian life (Royal Commission 1885, 189).

Stating what people believed to be the obvious and proving it were entirely separate matters. Throughout all the hearings that took place up and down the west coast by the government commission of investigation, there was little to support the belief that the Chinese were an aggressive and agitational collection of people. In fact when it came to the practice of labour violence, Anglo Saxons were far ahead in the race. In his summary of the evidence presented to the commission, commissioner Mr. Justice Chapleau declared, "Not merely are they judged by an unfair standard and painted blacker than they are, things innocent in themselves, because different from what we are used to, are in the true spirit of barbarism, treated as badges of degradation" (Royal Commission 1885, iv). Yet the response by the Toronto trades union newspaper *The Tribune* was typical of the hysteria that dominated the pages of the labour press on this issue. Apparently unable to find concrete examples of Chinese debasement at home, the newspaper reprinted an article clipped from a South African journal about the behaviour of Chinese labourers in that country:

The Transvaal papers give lists of items from the bill. One day it is a gang of runaway Chinese who attack a lonely farm, murder the farmer, and are luckily disturbed while proceeding to murder his wife and the children. Another day a European storekeeper is murdered by Chinese raiders in his store. Another day two Indians are murdered in their hut by twenty Chinese. Sometimes the Chinese murder each other; a band of them raid a Chinaman's shop and murder him; a Chinaman is found slashed to death on the velt; Chinese and Kaffirs meet and a Chinaman is killed, and so on, and so on (The Tribune, 21 October 1905).

Did killing come naturally? To read the labour journals of the Victorian Age, the craft had been mastered in the old country and became as one might note, part of the national culture. It was unstoppable, and to the Chinese, a way of life that did not need to be altered. As the Toronto based journal the *Trades Union Advocate/Wage Worker* noted in 1882:

The Chinese are a vile race. It is recorded that in one locality in China they recently destroyed 80 percent of their children, and in another 35 percent, merely because they were girls. We do not want wholesale murderers here; we want men, and against men our own mechanics could successfully compete, but not against Chinese (Trades Union Advocate/Wage Worker, 3 May 1882).

When the Honourable Frank McCoppin, a state senator from California testified before a joint committee of the U.S. House and Senate investigating the issue of Chinese immigration into North America, he repeated what was to become a clarion call by those desirous of closing the doors to Chinese immigration and deporting those already here. He testified that the Chinese were not prepared to become useful citizens in their new homelands. The senator noted that Chinese property holdings in his state were negligible, proof he argued that Chinese immigrants were here only for the short haul. In his words “they threaten to overrun the Pacific coast; but they are determined to return to China” (Royal Commission 1885, 179). The good senator would not find the labour press quarrelsome on this issue. R. Parmeter Pettipiece, editor of the Vancouver based *Western Clarion* and Canada’s leading Marxist socialist was of like mind:

It is well known that the Asiatic and the western peoples cannot assimilate. When they come in contact either one or the other must predominate. The introduction of the Asiatic into western civilization has a marked deleterious effect and vice versa. But capitalism is no respecter of persons, creeds, institutions, racial characteristics or anything else. It only knows profit and to obtain it will trample under foot all other considerations (The Western Clarion, 1 September 1906).

So what was it that made the Chinese so obnoxious to their working class brothers and sisters? Although the dimensions were numerous, the objection could be summed up in one word — character. However, character was an issue that was not limited to the Chinese alone. In fact, the concept of character dominated the various debates about immigration in general and the Chinese got caught up in the swirl of activity. Writing in his *Labor Advocate* in 1891 Phillips Thompson articulated the issue in this fashion:

The Canadian Manufacturer – of all papers in the world – has a couple of strong, forcibly written articles condemning, in the most emphatic terms, the importation of English guttersnipes, as conducted by Dr. Barnardo and other frauds of like kidney, and the proposal of General Booth to ship consignments of English paupers to Canada. ... it proves by Barnardo’s own testimony that the character of many of these immigrants is of the worst possible description, and adds: – “it is with these waifs and strays that Dr. Barnardo and the other British philanthropists are populating Canada, and the Dominion Government are encouraging them to do it.” To say that we are surprised is to put it mildly. We are glad the manufacturer is getting new light, and hope that it will review its ideas on some other phases of the social question (The Labor Advocate 24 April 1891).

It was inevitable that the Chinese were to come under the same scrutiny and be far less able to defend themselves against the numerous charges that appeared in the labour press that they were of faulty character. The fault lines in the Asian character were examined in a number of areas such as their penchant for gambling, their relationships with their spouses and children, their lack of respect for working class standards and above all, the fact that they practiced a religion that had little or no relationship with the Christianity that dominated the North American continent. In fact, their beliefs were light years away from anything a North

American could possibly comprehend.

If they were not superstitious, the Chinese would not be anything. Every commonest act seems to be done according to some mode described by the ubiquitous astrologers or soothsayers. ... Fear of the devil seems to be more the character of Chinese religion than love of God, and when these ignorant dwellers on the water experience some accident, they promptly resort to means of driving his rather Satantic majesty back into the water when he comes (The Trades Journal, 11 March 1884).

There is little doubt that in the Victorian Age, Caucasians regarded themselves as the superior race that dominated this planet. For many, it was the duty of the white man to carry the message of civilization and rule of law however interpreted to those who did not completely understand why they would need it or benefit by it. Of course, as Britain, France, Germany, Spain and other European powers laid claim to much of the world and the majority of its people, Christian missionaries took advantage of imperialism to spread the word of God to the “coloured heathen.” However, it was one thing to preach the gospel to those who were still living in their homelands, quite another to march into ethnic slums in North America with the same message.

For the majority of labour journalists, home missions were a waste of time and energy. Quite simply, the Chinese were incapable of accepting the benefits of the Church. Writing in his monthly *Industrial Banner* in May of 1899, Joseph Marks quoting a clergy friend stated. “He further asserted that it was his belief that for every Chinaman whom the missionaries converted to Christianity, the Chinese were responsible for sending two white men to hell” (*The Industrial Banner*, May 1899).

If that were not enough to discourage the faith from seeking converts, a story and commentary that appeared in the Toronto, Ontario *The Lance* on 26 June 1909 should have done the trick:

It is not likely that the lesson which that murder of the girl missionary by the Chinaman in New York teaches will be greatly heeded. Already those who have been encouraging Sunday School teaching of Chinese “converts” by white girls in Toronto are rushing into print to assure the public that there is no danger in the practice here. One would think that the most ordinary common sense would teach even those who are eager to shine as converters of the heathen, that supplying each Chinese “convert” with his special individual girl teacher is both senseless and improper. The fact that the Chinese demand it ought to be sufficient to warn even piety patters that the thing ought not to be done.

Not all of the “converted” heathen are like unto this picturesque savage in all respect, but with many of them the new religion only goes skin deep, while the old paganism remains, deep-seated and ingrained, a part of their very being, without which they would not be themselves, nor would they necessarily be any better than their old selves. Too often “conversion” is only another name for turning a good pagan into an indifferent Christian (The Lance, 26 June 1909).

None other than the prominent English philosopher John Stuart Mill became involved in the Chinese question that was dominating North American society following the U.S. Civil War. Mill, whose remarks were printed in the Hamilton, Ontario *People's Journal* pondered as to whether or not it was possible to bring the Chinese sense of civilization up to that experienced in Great Britain.

Is it justifiable to assume that the character and habits of the Chinese are unsusceptible of improvement? The institutions of the United States are the most potent means that have yet existed of spreading the most important elements of civilization down to the poorest and most ignorant of the laboring masses. If every Chinese child were compulsorily brought under your school system, or under a still more effective one, if possible and kept under a sufficient number of years, would not the Chinese population be in time raised to the level of the American? One kind of restrictive measure seems to be not only desirable, but absolutely called for – the most stringent laws against introducing Chinese immigrants as Coolies, i.e., under contracts binding them to the service of particular persons. All such obligations are a form of compulsory labor, that is, of slavery (The People's Journal, 9 July 1870).

Mill's query was brought to the attention of Henry George, a prominent American intellectual and activist and founder of the single tax movement. George responded in a typical nineteenth century pose when he declared that the Chinese should receive the benefit of education if for no other reason than, "The opportunity it gives of conveying the ideas of a more civilized country into the heart of China [which] is an advantage to the people of China of which (I said) I do not think it would be right to deprive them" (*The People's Journal*, 9 July 1870).

Alas, the *People's Journal* was the creation of Hamilton based Isaac Buchanan, a wealthy industrialist and politician who depended on labour for support. His words did not appear in the labour press and neither did those of Mill or George. The words of William Rowe, editor of the Knights of Labour journal the *Palladium of Labor* did, striking a more sympathetic note in the ears of Canada's labouring classes.

The importation in the United States and Canada of cheap labour is a menace to civilization. All the labour in the country can not go West, then when displaced by men who are willing to live on bread and potatoes, sleep on the bare floor of a hovel packed like sardines, and work for what ever they can get. The majority must stay if only for the lack of means to undertake a long journey, and in order to maintain a mere existence they will be compelled to lower their scale of living and emulate the habits of semi barbarians. In the place of intelligent, independent communities of free men there will be masses of ignorance, vice and uncleanness, service and imbrooted by long hours of labour, degrading surroundings and the lack of comforts and decencies of civilized life (Palladium of Labor, 12 April 1884).

Rowe provided evidence that the question of importing Chinese labourers had reached the central Canadian labour press shortly after it became an issue on the west coast. As he noted, workers who could afford to go west and work in the mining and forestry industries, ran the risk of being replaced by workers who would offer their services for less income than that expected by an easterner, in other words, Chinese immigrants.

To the Caucasian mind, the Chinese presented an air of mystery, a mystery that contained within itself a sense of malevolence. Their diseases were odd, imported from a world of which North Americans had only scant knowledge. Rather than accept the ways of their dubious hosts, they continued to respond to illness much the same as they had in generations past in the homeland.

The Chinese druggist and his clerks wear the same haughty and secretive airs which so become their Caucasian co-labourers. Should an ailing fellow country man call at the establishment to have his pain relieved and his ills cured, he merely steps into the store. The druggist's knowledge of Mongolian diseases enables him to diagnose at once where the seat of the suffering man's ailment lies. The wise and all discerning pharmacist shrugs his shoulders and mutters a word or two. A clerk steps up to a box and draws forth a dried snake, coiled and held in that position by skewers. He passes it to an attendant and while the patient is counting out his two dollars the snake is reduced to a powder and put in a paper package. The sufferer goes his way with a gleam of hope in his eyes, for every Chinese knows that snake powder is a determined foe to rheumatic pains (The Montreal Echo, 18 July 1891).

There was no word in the English medical language that could strike fear into the hearts of a Canadian worker more than leprosy. It was a disease that left its victims with distorted limbs, broken skin, uncontrollable sores and no sense of hope. Although most of the knowledge that one could acquire regarding this horrid affliction came from ancient times through the Scriptures, the Chinese were accused of bringing the Biblical curse into the nineteenth century with a vengeance.

In San Francisco 195 cases of leprosy have been traced by the physicians of that city to smoking cigarettes manufactured by Chinese lepers. The people of British Columbia have taken up the cry, "The Chinese must go." The erection at Victoria of a Chinese factory for the manufacture of clothing, tinware and cigars is the cause of the trouble. Mr. Litchman, editor of the Essex Statesman, Marblehead, Mass., and who is properly called the "Demonthenes of Labour" recently visited San Francisco and speaks of Chinatown: – "I regard it as the greatest blot every suffered to exist in a civilized community. I had read of its filth, but never supposed it possible that such a plague spot could be tolerated a single day in an American city. No public speaker and no public writer would be allowed to use the language necessary to fitly expose the horrible things I saw in Chinatown" (Trades Union Advocate/Wage Worker, 10 August 1882).

If the fear of leprosy weren't enough, the editor of the Toronto based *Trades Union Advocate/Wage Worker* Eugene Donovan used his 21 September 1882 issue to accuse the Chinese of importing cholera on a wholesale basis to their communities across the country (*Trades Union Advocate/Wage Worker*, 21 September 1882). Within a few months, the vision of the Chinese disease carrier littered the pages of nearly every journal published by a trades union in Canada.

On a cold, clear crisp Saturday evening in February of 1885, a Grand Trunk passenger train pulled into Bonaventure Station in Montreal. One of its conductors, a man named George Longely had a fever. It would turn out to be the dreaded

small pox. Montreal had not seen the disease in the 1870s. In fact, the city was lulled in a false sense of security when it closed the only hospital dedicated to the treatment of the disease (Bliss 1991, 11-12). Surely, there could be no domestic rationale for this new outbreak. It had to have come from the outside world. And as Robert Drummond, editor of the Nova Scotia miners' newspaper *The Trades Journal* had argued some two years previous this kind of disease could only be imported by unhealthy and unsanitary immigrants (*The Trades Journal*, 23 May 1883). The Chinese qualified on both counts.

There is perhaps no better way to defile an ethnic group than to accuse its members of serious breaches of the law. In this respect, the Chinese were no different. Seldom was a journalistic opportunity missed to accuse some Chinese person of a heinous crime. As has been shown, murder topped the bill, but it was by far only one of many serious infractions that plagued the Chinese community at least in the eyes of Caucasians. West coast editor John Shirliff Mayfield Duval did not shrink from his "responsibility" to fuel the racial fire:

Jesse C. Wickersham and wife, were found murdered at their ranch near Cloverdale, Cal. The Chinese cook name Ah Tai was missed and it was subsequently ascertained that he had succeeded in getting on board the steamer for Hong Kong. Moral – by all means, keep the inoffensive little brown man in your homes (The Industrial News, 30 January 1886).

The *Toronto Toiler* took issue with attempts to teach the Chinese in that city any respect for Christian values and Christian morality. The newspaper noted that Chinese were regulars at Sunday services, but argued that the only reason that Chinese went to church was to gather afterwards to plan and participate in criminal activities.

After their Sunday School is out, they congregate at the resort on Queen, near Church and opposite Elizabeth, and indulge in their favorite gambling games, and it is quite certain that when these are over there are more Chinamen on Queen Street on Sunday nights after eleven o'clock than there are white men. Charity begins at home, they should remember, and they would do well to improve our own citizen rather than waste their sweetness in the atmosphere of the Orientals – but that might be too commonplace a proceeding to be of interest. The proper place for Chinamen is China, and the less encouragement they get here the better it will be for all (The Toiler, 16 September 1904).

In much the same sense of hysteria that found its way into the Depression age anti marijuana film *Reefer Madness*, the Canadian labour press attributed virtually every vice that emerged in the Chinese neighbourhoods to the use of opium. Once again, the Marxist editor R. Parmeter Pettipiece reflected on the issue in the Vancouver based *Trades Unionist*.

In the fastest growing Oriental section of the city every conceivable sort of the rankest kind of "sweat shops" exist; or perhaps thrive would be a better term. And as sort of a refuge for the social garbage as a result of such economic conditions, the Chinese have provided the town with plenty of opium joints, where over 100 white women, social outcasts who have fallen to the last depths of degradation, are imprisoned victims of these monstrous dens of iniquity. So much for this phase of the importation of Asiatics by the good patriotic law

and order industrial scalawags of this province, to whom nothing but "profits for us; wages for slaves," spells anything (The Trades Unionist, March 1908).

Like opium smoking, it would appear that bad habits were learned at home. As Thomas H. King, a San Francisco merchant and former resident of China told the government commission of investigation:

Sodomy is a habit. Sometimes thirty or forty boys leaving Hong Kong apparently in good health, before arriving here would be found to be afflicted about the anus with venereal diseases, and on questioning the Chinese doctors to disclose what it was, they admitted that it was a common practice among them (Royal Commission 1885, 189).

The tale told by a six year resident of China was far more chilling. John T. Tobin's testimony spoke to what he considered the most immoral sexual acts that any Caucasian could imagine.

I have never seen sodomy committed between man and man, but I have seen it with beasts and detected them in the act – with hogs, dogs and ducks – but not in a great number of cases. They were committed by the municipal law. Every refreshment house is a gambling house; they license them. Prostitution is not looked upon as a degrading occupation; it is carried on openly. I know of rich persons in Shanghai who bought the wives they married. Have known people leaving their wives to people they are in debt to in lieu of such debt. They marry prostitutes out of the houses (Royal Commission 1885, 228).

The sexual preferences and habits of the Chinese did not see a lot of print in the Canadian labour press of the period but the innuendo clearly implied that something was not quite right when it came to carnal morals in the Orient. It was just one more excuse to keep the yellow peril at bay.

When both East Indian and Japanese immigration began to supplement that from China, the federal government initiated yet one more commission of inquiry into immigration practices especially on the west coast. Reporting in 1902, the commission drew a conclusion that surprised no one, namely that immigrant labour impacted negatively on home grown (read Caucasian) labour and something had to be done about it (Ward 1978, 60). In 1906, the federal minister of immigration Clifford Sifton introduced legislation to restrict the inflow of those who were "diseased, destitute and the immoral" (Roy 2003, 37). His legislation gave the cabinet the power to refuse entry to any class of immigrant it chose.

On a hot and sticky evening in the summer of 1907, a group calling itself the Asiatic Exclusion League planned to hold an anti immigration rally in Vancouver. Rumours had been spreading throughout the city that boatloads of new arrivals from Asia were about to enter the country. The hall was packed to capacity and hundreds of would be attendees were forced to stand outside the meeting place. When a Seattle exclusionist gave a particularly inflammatory speech, part of the crowd left the area and moved toward Chinatown. When a young man threw a brick through the window of a Chinese business, suddenly hundreds of bricks, bottles and stones appeared and were launched. A few minutes later, another mob ransacked the Japanese community in the city. The Japanese unlike their Chinese counterparts fought back. Four hours later with heavy police intervention what

became known as the Vancouver riot was over (Ward 1978, 60). The immigration noose continued to tighten around the necks of the Asians until in 1922, the Government of Canada put a halt to all Chinese immigration into the country.

Reflections on Race and Revolution

The history of working class consciousness in Canada and specifically in the way it dealt with race relations can provide valuable moments for reflection on precisely what took place when organised labour through its journalism decided that the working class need not include those who were not Caucasian and therefore European in origin. In other words, the working class failed the essential test of hegemony. Rather than attempt to convert all of society to its beliefs and goals, it attempted to remove a significant and potentially valuable asset in its war against big capital. As history has shown, it was a most unfortunate exclusion. It would be some time before organised labour in North America extended the hand of brotherhood and sisterhood to those of different races and those of different genders. Needless to say, the forced exclusion of significant portions of the working class left those who were organised in a primarily defensive position when confronting employers. As the mine, mill and market garden capitalists along the west coast soon discovered labour's inability to see beyond its collective nose would allow them to hire non union labour at virtually wage slave incomes which in turn further weakened the union movement.

It should come as no surprise that the unskilled, uneducated labourer who toiled in the mines and mills should see his equivalent from the Orient as threatening. But what is more surprising is that the journalists who moved in union circles should support the same blatant racism and exclusion. Yet, a careful examination of the trades union journals published after Confederation and before the First World War only treated working class solidarity as a white, Anglo Saxon initiative. But then again, perhaps no one should be shocked. After all, it was the age of imperialism and that grand desire to make the world safe for the ideas and ideals of the white man did trickle down into working class culture, much to its detriment.

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