

# 'Apology' shows Trudeau flaw

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Pierre Trudeau's apology to the Japanese is an exquisite example of his shortfall as a national leader. Why offend the huge constituency with keen memories of World War II?

To apologize in Japan to the "official" Japanese for wrongs done by the Canadian government in Canada during the '40s tells me that he has stupid or insensitive advisers in both the foreign and domestic spheres — apparently in this case, Ivan Head and Richard O'Hagan.

The apology reminds us of Trudeau's own conduct during the war. Many of his age group were being killed off or wounded as war volunteers. Many of his language and age group were literally hiding out from conscription, but they had the emotional support of many in the French Canadian community.

Trudeau? He was in the comfortable covert of a militia regiment, with an officer's commission, and thus free from either conscription or active service overseas.

Trudeau's apology would have been more readily accepted if he had given it in the name of his own political party, the Liberals. On this point, it is almost fantastic, given his father-in-law's experience in B.C. and federal politics. This is not to blame Jimmy Sinclair, an air force veteran, but he was the rising Liberal star in B.C. during a period when the issues of oriental immigrants, their citizenship and civil rights were loudly debated. And the issue of oriental immigration — not Japanese this time — is alive and bubbling still in B.C.

In English language papers all across Canada last week there was a flood of letters, critical about the apology. Not all are from war veterans or from bitter Nisei and Sansei offspring of the original immigrants from Japan.

Trudeau is rather poorly educated about Canadian history other than Quebec and constitutional history. Although the sequestration and evacuation in February, 1942, of the 25,000 or so Japanese Canadians on the West Coast is an episode of modern history, it did happen after Trudeau became an adult.

As an atrocity, this episode compares as the jailing

of innocents during the October crisis of 1970 does to dozens of documented cases of torture and execution carried out officially by agents of the Japanese government which held power in the 1930s and '40s. Prime Minister Miki would think it unfair to be lumped with the likes of Tojo. Yet Trudeau bundled Canada, his government, and all of us, back into the '40s, and onto the same level as the architects of the slaughter at Pearl Harbour, and at Hong Kong, of Canadians.

Some Canadians in the '40s were brave and enough aware of human rights to speak out against what the Liberal government did to the B.C. Japanese. The CCF's Angus MacInnis was one. Another was the Canadian historian, Arthur Lower.

A famous Liberal party advertisement in the Vancouver papers of October, 1935, was big and garish. Above the pictures of six Grit candidates, including the famous Gerry McGeer and the later King Minister, Ian MacKenzie, was the headline:

"50,000 orientals in B.C.  
CCF party stands pledged  
to give them the vote.

The Liberal party is opposed  
to giving these orientals the vote.

Where will you stand on election day?"

In smaller type an elaboration said that the CCF would give Chinamen and Japanese "the same voting right that you have."

So not all Canadians need to have an apology of any kind made for them in Japan. Liberals do.

It was a "first" in diplomatic history that a Canadian minister in 1907 got a "gentleman's agreement" from the Japanese that they would cooperate in tightly restricting Japanese immigration to Canada. "First" because it was the first diplomatic initiative taken and carried out unilaterally by Ottawa without turning to our British patrons.

In the '20s and '30s the Canadian and Japanese governments pared this immigration down to a maximum of '80 a year. Further, the Japanese governments never showed any interest in protecting or even arguing for the civil rights here of the Japanese who had come to Canada. (Today Japanese immigrants are few, compared to Filipinos or Pakistani.)

An expiation provided by a public apology for our treatment of the B.C. Japanese in the '40s may have merit — in Canada for Canadians. We might have it repeated again and again, especially by Liberals for Liberals who tend to call others "racist" these days. The case deserves prominence in our textbooks these days. As they debate new immigration laws our Parliamentarians should re-examine the case for its lessons, especially a lesson on the very real narrowness of our generosity to strange outsiders.