

## Race, Employment Discrimination, and State Complicity in Wartime Canada, 1939-1945

Carmela Patrias

Volume 59, printemps 2007

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/11t59art01>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Patrias, C. (2007). Race, Employment Discrimination, and State Complicity in Wartime Canada, 1939-1945. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 59, 10–42.

Résumé de l'article

L'étude montre que la crise entraînée par la guerre a renforcé l'inégalité sociale et économique existante basée sur les opinions et les pratiques racistes. Les anxiétés provoquées par la guerre ont en effet intensifié la suspicion des « étrangers » — un terme qui englobe un grand nombre de personnes nées au Canada ou naturalisées, d'origine japonaise, européenne (du centre, de l'est ou du sud) et juive. Ces indigènes ont été perçus comme peu patriotiques, déloyaux, radicaux et incapables de devenir de vrais Canadiens. La guerre a brusquement ravivé et même intensifié les préjugés racistes que les Canadiens d'origine africaine, européenne (de l'est et du sud) et les Autochtones ne convenaient pas aux travaux manuels; que les Canadiens d'origine juive, chinoise et japonaise étaient économiquement agressifs; et que les juifs en particulier s'adonnaient aux pratiques louches. De tels stéréotypes racistes, à leur tour, ont rendu légitime la marginalisation permanente de ces minorités dans le monde du travail. L'État a contribué aux pratiques racistes. Il est certain que tous les représentants de l'État et tous les Canadiens n'étaient pas racistes. Mais la discrimination en matière d'emploi et la complicité des autorités à cet effet soulignent l'omniprésence du racisme au Canada pendant la guerre. Les représentants de l'État — certains d'entre eux avaient des idées racistes — étaient prêts à accepter les préférences racistes des employeurs et des travailleurs car ils avaient peur de provoquer des troubles sociaux et d'interrompre la production des industries de guerre. De plus, les représentants se sont rendus compte que la relégation aux travaux manuels des groupes minoritaires, tels que les Canadiens d'origine chinoise et japonaise et les Autochtones, offrirait l'important avantage de combler les emplois que les Canadiens évitaient parce qu'ils avaient plus d'options.

# ARTICLES

## Race, Employment Discrimination, and State Complicity in Wartime Canada, 1939-1945

Carmela Patrias

SOMETIME IN 1941 A GROUP of “Slavic” workers travelled from Alberta to Ontario in search of skilled jobs in war industries. All the workers were Canadian-born and all had been trained under the government’s War Emergency Training Programme. Yet despite shortages in skilled labour in Ontario, they were unable to obtain work. Upon learning their names, Ontario employers refused to hire them, and the workers were eventually forced to return to Alberta.<sup>1</sup> The rejection of these workers, despite their Canadian birth and training, baffles the contemporary reader. Were these workers of Polish, Ukrainian, Czech, Slovak, Serbian, or Croatian descent? Did they trace their origins to countries at war with Canada or ones allied with it? Ontario employers apparently considered such information irrelevant. Not the national heritage of these “Slavic” workers, but their “race” convinced prospective employers that they were unfit to work in war industries.

In 1941 “foreign” names were widely understood as markers of racial difference. The introduction to the volume on Canada’s population in the 1941 census,

<sup>1</sup>Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC], Ralston Papers, MG 27 III B11, vol.113, Manpower Labour Supply Investigation. Committee’s report to the Labour Coordination Committee, October 1941, p. F31. My attention was drawn to this important report by Thomas M. Prymak, *Maple Leaf and Trident: The Ukrainian Canadians During the Second World War* (Toronto 1988).

for example, stated that “knowledge of one’s racial origin” could be “perpetuated in a family name.” Census analysts found it necessary to explain the criteria by which “racial origin” could be known, because the basis for racial classification in the census varied for different groups. “Colour” was the basis for classifying the “Indian, Eskimo, Negro, Hindu, Chinese and Japanese races,” religion for classifying Jews, and language for Ukrainians. For some groups “racial origin” implied “geographical area — the country from which the individual himself came or that which was the home of his forebears.” While in most cases racial origin could be traced through the father, children of “mixed Blood” — those born of mixed marriages between whites and “Negro, Japanese, Chinese, Hindu, Malaysian etc.” — were classified as belonging to those racial groups if either parent belonged to the “black, yellow or brown races.” The racial designation for people of mixed “white and Indian blood” was “Half-breed.”<sup>2</sup>

That the names of the “Slavic” workers from Alberta signified “racial” difference of sufficient magnitude to disqualify them from obtaining work in war industries suggests that however imprecise its definition, the racial origin designation was economically and socially very significant. One goal of this article is to examine the nature and extent of racist employment discrimination during World War II. It will show that, in wartime Canada, racializing minority groups — attributing to them substantial, inborn distinguishing characteristics — greatly disadvantaged group members in the labour market and prevented their full incorporation within the body of the nation.<sup>3</sup> A second and related goal is to demonstrate that despite officially prohibiting employment discrimination based on race, nationality, and religion during the war, state officials colluded with racist employers and workers in such discrimination.

The focus on the war years offers a unique opportunity for studying racist employment discrimination because evidence of such discrimination on the home front abounds. Unprecedented intervention by the federal government in the labour market generated some of this evidence. State officials intent on maximizing labour productivity during the war were forced to pay close attention to employment discrimination because members of racialized minority groups constituted an indispensable source of labour. On the one hand, discrimination threatened productivity both by creating tensions among workers and by excluding some of them from cer-

<sup>2</sup>Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Eighth Census of Canada, 1941*, Vol. 1, *General Review and Summary Tables* (Ottawa 1950), 218-219.

<sup>3</sup>For discussions of racialization in Canada see the following works by Vic Satzewich: *Racism and the Incorporation of Foreign Labour* (London 1991); “The Political Economy of Race and Ethnicity,” in Peter S. Li, ed., *Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1999); “Whiteness Limited: Racialization and the Social Construction of ‘Peripheral Europeans’,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 33 (November 2000), 271-289. Also, Kay Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1900* (Kingston and Montreal 1991).

tain occupations. On the other, after 1942, when employment was plentiful and menial jobs went unfilled, racialization could be useful in channelling workers into undesirable yet essential jobs. This study draws extensively on the records of federal government agencies. Minority group members — not necessarily from the same groups that attracted official attention — had their own reasons for documenting employment discrimination. They believed that the blatant contradiction between Canada's declared war aim of fighting the racism of the Nazis and racist discrimination at home, combined with the high demand for labour and state control over the labour force, created propitious circumstances for challenging employment discrimination. The records of voluntary organizations established by racialized minority groups, especially by Jews and African Canadians, comprise the second important body of evidence on which this study relies.<sup>4</sup>

Studying employment discrimination during the war can do more, however, than illustrate the nature and significance of racism between 1939 and 1945. That the national heritage of the "Slavic" workers from Alberta made so little difference to Ontario employers suggests that employment discrimination on the home front owed far less to wartime alliances on the international stage than to longstanding association between "race" and suitability for certain types of employment and for citizenship in Canada. To be sure, state officials anticipated — and some of them shared — security concerns about the participation of "enemy aliens" in home defense and war production. As we shall see, however, many employers, workers, and state officials also racialized Canadian-born and naturalized people of Japanese, central, eastern, and southern European, and Jewish origin: many Canadians saw these racialized groups as "foreigners," suspected them of disloyalty, and therefore believed that they were undeserving of certain types of economic and political rights. The war also brought sharply into focus and even intensified racist assumptions that African Canadians, eastern and southern Europeans, and Native people were suitable only for menial jobs and that the aggressive and greedy Jews, and Chinese and Japanese Canadians constituted unfair competition for "true" Canadians because they placed economic gains above patriotic duty. Such racist assumptions served to legitimize the marginalization of minority groups in Canadian society.

The inclusion of minority groups of southern and eastern European parentage — such as the "Slavic" workers introduced above — as well as of African, Asian,

<sup>4</sup>The study also relies on wartime newspapers and magazines. The papers of government departments and voluntary associations consulted for the study contained a large number of newspaper clippings. The *Hamilton Spectator* archive of World War II, available on-line through the Museum of Civilization, provided access not only to the *Spectator*, but also to *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Telegram* and *The Toronto Daily Star*. With the help of Larry Savage, I consulted *Le Devoir*, the *Montreal Gazette*, *Niagara Falls Review*, the *St. Catharines Standard*, *Welland Tribune*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Canadian Forum*, and *Saturday Night* systematically for the war years.

and Native Canadians, is central to the analysis of the meaning and impact of race offered here. Some of the most influential recent studies of racism in Canada make clear that characterizing groups that we would describe today as “white,” as racially distinct and inferior, reveals the social construction and hence fluidity of racial classification.<sup>5</sup> Even in these studies, however, the attention given “visible” minorities generally outweighs examinations of the racialization of groups of European origin. Such a focus is understandable because people of colour have been the targets of the most extreme and most overtly state-sanctioned racism in Canada, in the form of immigration restrictions, denial of the franchise, and legal exclusion from certain types of jobs. It is also easier to study such racism than the less formalized racialization of groups of European descent. This study’s focus on employment discrimination allows us to explore the meaning and impact of racist ideas and practices for minority groups of peripheral European as well as African, Asian, and Native parentage, because the mobility of all these groups in the labour force was impeded during the war.<sup>6</sup>

The debate among American historians concerning the racial classification of immigrant workers of southern and eastern European descent offers useful insights for studying similar groups in Canada. According to James Barrett and David Roediger the status of such workers in turn-of-the-20th-century America was ambiguous. Before World War I, when non-white immigrants were barred from entering the US, the national government classified immigrants from the peripheries of Europe as white, allowing them to immigrate to the United States in large numbers and to become naturalized and thus enfranchised. The imposition of restrictions against them in the 1920s reflected the intensification of racism against such European immigrants. However, their ability to become white over time, despite the fact that both social science and popular culture regarded them as “nonwhite,” reflected their “inbetween” status: above African and Asian Americans, whose purported colour kept them at the bottom of the prevailing system of racial hierarchy, but below native-born whites and immigrants from northwestern Europe, whose purported whiteness placed them at the top of that hierarchy. The changing

<sup>5</sup>See Satzewich, “Whiteness Limited”; Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto 1999), 6. In his path-breaking *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto 1982), Howard Palmer used the term nativism to describe prejudice against groups of European origin, arguing that racism was inapplicable to white groups. More recently, *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*, 2nd ed. (Toronto 2000), by Frances Henry et al., questioned the application of “racism” to groups of European origin on grounds that it diminishes the “colonization” of coloured people, (22) while Eric W. Sager and Christopher Morier, “Immigrants, Ethnicity and Earnings in 1901: Revisiting Canada’s Vertical Mosaic,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 83 (2002), 196-229, a quantitative analysis of the 1901 census, suggested that ethnicity had no significant impact on the class position of Canadians.

<sup>6</sup>“Peripheral” Europeans is Vic Satzewich’s term for eastern and southern Europeans. See Satzewich, “Whiteness Limited.”

classification of southern and eastern European immigrants and their children formed part of the process of their Americanization, itself the result both of the willingness of the dominant racializing groups to perceive them as white and of their self-identification as white.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, Eric Arnesen, among others, questions the utility of “whiteness” as an analytic concept, arguing that whiteness scholars misrepresent the racialization of European immigrants in the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries by reducing this “complex, many faceted” process to “the matter of ‘becoming white’.”<sup>8</sup>

Some of the arguments of both whiteness scholars and their critics apply to Canada as well. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, here, as in the United States, the status of groups of eastern and southern European descent was above that of groups of African and Asian descent and Native people, and below that of people of Northwestern European descent. Moreover, here, as in the United States, the status of people from the peripheries of Europe was ambiguous. Encouraged to come by the hundreds of thousands prior to World War I, such immigrants were classified ‘non-preferred’ during the interwar years. They were allowed into Canada before the Depression only in the numbers needed to perform work that Canadian residents avoided. One clear expression of their perceived inferiority in Canada was their exclusion, along with immigrants of Asian and African descent, from ‘better neighbourhoods’ by legally accepted covenants. But, with the exception of the 1917 elections, when even naturalized members of these groups were deprived of their vote, European immigrants could secure citizenship rights. Such rights were denied to people of Asian descent, but not to African Canadians. Nevertheless, as Constance Backhouse has argued, although the racial identity of the dominant white group was splintered in many directions, a “racial chasm” separated such groups from Native people, and from people of African and Asian descent.<sup>9</sup> As noted above, the 1941 census classifications tracing the racial designation of most children through the father assigned children to the “black, yellow or brown races,” if either their fathers or their mothers belonged to those “races,” and described children of mixed “white and Indian blood,” regardless of the gender of the Native parent, as “Half-breeds.”

Yet, although skin colour was so significant to racial assignment in Canada, purported racial inferiority and superiority were most often not expressed in terms

<sup>7</sup>James R. Barrett and David R. Roediger, “Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the New Immigrant Working Class,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 16 (Spring 1997), 3-44. Another fascinating account of the racialization of European immigrants is Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrant and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA 1998).

<sup>8</sup>Eric Arnesen, “Whiteness and the Historians’ Imagination,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (Fall 2001), 3-23. See also contributions from David Brody, Barbara Fields, Eric Foner, and Adolph Reed, Jr. in the same issue.

<sup>9</sup>Backhouse, *Colour-Coded*, 9.

of colour. Even more tellingly, colour was not central to the self-definition of “inbetween” people. Indeed, given the uneven distribution of people of colour in Canada, eastern and southern Europeans were the only racialized “others” in many communities. The differences between the make-up of the populations of Canada and the United States go a long way toward explaining the difference in racial discourse in the two countries. Most importantly, the weakness of the institution of slavery in Canada’s past and racist immigration policies meant that, in contrast to the United States, the number of people of African descent in Canada remained small until the last decades of the 20th century. Consequently, the type of black-white polarization that some scholars place at the core of American racial thought did not develop in Canada. To claim that immigrants from the peripheries of Europe were initially perceived as “non-white,” and that they “became white” in the course of their integration into Canadian society would, to use Arnesen’s terms, oversimplify a complex and multifaceted process of racialization. This article examines only part of this process: the construction of racial classification in wartime by Anglo-Canadian (and to a lesser extent French Canadian) state officials, employers, and workers, and the impact of such classification on minority workers. I hope to explore minority workers’ self-identification, specifically their response to racialization in wartime Canada, in the future.

By illuminating state complicity in the racialization of workers, the study’s focus on racist employment discrimination also sheds new light on the role of the state in wartime Canada. Studies of the relationship between the state and minority groups in wartime Canada have hitherto concentrated largely on the Nationalities Branch of the Department of National War Services and the Cooperative Committee in Canadian Citizenship. Because these two agencies were created by the federal government specifically to mobilize minority groups behind Canada’s war effort, and to increase group harmony by familiarizing English and French Canadians with minority groups and their contributions to Canadian society, their records offer rich and readily accessible sources for studying state-minority relations in wartime. Some scholars believe that such endeavours marked the first step in citizenship training, or in Canada’s progress toward a tolerant and inclusive national policy of multiculturalism.<sup>10</sup> Others characterize these undertakings as Eurocentric

<sup>10</sup>N.F. Dreisziger, “The Rise of a Bureaucracy for Multiculturalism: The Origins of the Nationalities Branch, 1939-1941,” in Norman Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan, and Lubomyr Luciuk, eds., *On Guard for Thee: War, Ethnicity and the Canadian State, 1939-1945* (Ottawa 1988), 1-29; Leslie Pal, *Interest of State: The Politics of Language, Multiculturalism and Feminism in Canada* (Montreal 1993), 64-77; Bohdan Kordan and Lubomyr Y. Luciuk, “A Prescription for Nationbuilding: Ukrainian Canadians and the Canadian State, 1939-1945,” in *On Guard for Thee*; Bohdan Kordan, *Canada and the Ukrainian Question, 1939-1945* (Montreal and Kingston 2001).



and ineffectual.<sup>11</sup> Whatever their conclusions, the focus of scholars on the Nationalities Branch and the Cooperative Committee offers only a partial view of state-minority relations in wartime. The officials of many other government departments and agencies also dealt with racialized minority workers, and as this study will show, their collusion with racist employers and workers helped to block the mobility of minority workers in the labour force throughout the war. The state's complicity both reflected and legitimized racist views widely held in Canadian society both prior to and during World War II.

*The Denial of Employment and Relief*

Calls for the dismissal of "foreigners" from their jobs arose almost immediately after the outbreak of World War II and intensified in 1940, following the sudden and rapid successes of German troops in western Europe and Italy's entry into the war. Thousands of people across Canada lost their jobs. They came from a wide variety of occupations: miners in Cape Breton, steel workers in Hamilton, department store and hotel employees in Toronto and Winnipeg, municipal employees in Windsor and Calgary, and shipyard workers in Vancouver. They included not only workers who were born in, or could trace their origins to, countries now at war with Canada, such as Germany, Italy, and Japan, but also men and women born in, or whose ancestors were born in, countries allied with Canada. They also included both naturalized British and foreign subjects.<sup>12</sup>

The difficulties of many of these "foreign" workers were compounded by their inability to obtain relief. Many dismissed able-bodied workers were denied relief on the grounds that they were capable of working. This placed them in a "state of suspended animation with no means of support," in the words of T.C. Davis, Asso-

<sup>11</sup>William R. Young, "Chauvinism and Canadianism," in *On Guard for Thee*; John Herd Thompson, *Ethnic Minorities During Two World Wars* (Ottawa 1991). Mark Kristmanson, *Plateaus of Freedom: Nationality, Culture and State Security in Canada* (Toronto 2002), sees a link between state cultural policy and security concerns in multicultural states.

<sup>12</sup>*Montreal Gazette*, 15 September 1939, 22 May 1940; LAC, Department of Labour fonds [hereafter DL], RG 27, vol. 149, file 611.1:15, Margaret Livingstone to L.B. Pearson, 8 August 1940 and Philippe Lukawecki to Ernest Lapointe, 10 February 1941; LAC, Canadian Citizenship Branch sous fonds [hereafter CCB], RG 26, vol. 36, file: "German and Italian Unemployable," Clarence Gillis, CCF MP, Glace Bay South to Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Justice, 26 September 1940; Acadia University Archives [hereafter AUA], Watson Kirkconnell Papers [hereafter WKP], box 21, file 4, Dorothy Stepler to Watson Kirkconnell, 15 January 1941; *Hamilton Spectator*, 11 June 1940; Windsor Municipal Archives, City Council Minutes, 11 June 1940 and Board of Control Minutes 1940; "Fifth Column Hysteria is Helping Hitler," *Saturday Night*, 28 December 1940. On dismissals of Japanese Canadians even before Pearl Harbor see Forrest Emmanuel Laviolette, *The Canadian Japanese and World War II: A Sociological and Psychological Account* (1948; reprint, Toronto 1978), 45.



ciate Deputy Minister of the Department of National War Services [DNWS].<sup>13</sup> Because immigrant workers had been disproportionately represented among the unemployed during the Great Depression, the hardship caused by the combined loss of jobs and the denial of relief was great, especially in Ontario and Alberta, where the provincial governments decided to cut off relief to all non-naturalized immigrants.<sup>14</sup>

The ostensible reason for dismissals and the denial of relief was that these workers were potentially disloyal — enemies capable of all manner of subversive activity, including sabotage. Reports from Europe concerning fifth-column activity in the Netherlands and Norway fired the imagination of many Canadians — private citizens, public servants, and elected officials — and convinced them of the need to be vigilant.<sup>15</sup> Some of them harboured quite specific fears: that Japanese Canadian women employed in British Columbia fish canneries would poison herring intended for British soldiers, that Finnish loggers would destroy lumber required for making airplanes, or that German miners with Nazi sympathies would sabotage Nova Scotia mines.<sup>16</sup> Others expressed more sweeping distrust of all “foreigners.” Premier Mitchell Hepburn of Ontario justified denying relief to resident aliens by arguing that payments to these “potential enemies” would draw relief away from “the citizens of Ontario.” E.A. Horton, Ontario’s Director of Unemployment Relief, stated publicly that there should be no discrimination among relief recipients, even as he enhanced suspicion against foreign-born relief recipients by urging municipal and provincial relief administrators to increase vigilance by more frequent investigations of relief recipients’ homes. Even the naturalized among the foreign-born, Horton argued, still retained “considerable sympathy for the cause of the enemy at war with His Majesty the King.” He called upon relief administrators to report any subversive statements or sympathies to the Ontario Pro-

<sup>13</sup>LAC, Department of National War Services fonds [hereafter DNWS], RG 44, vol. 36, file: “German and Italian Unemployables,” T.C. Davis, Associate Deputy Minister of DNWS, to Norman McLarty, Minister of Labour, 21 December 1940.

<sup>14</sup>W. Burton Hurd, *Racial Origin and Nativity of the Canadian People* (Ottawa 1937); LAC, DNWS, RG 44, vol. 36, file: “German and Italian Unemployable,” Harry Hereford, Dominion Commissioner, Dominion Unemployment Relief, Department of Labour, to Justice T.C. Davis, Associate Deputy Minister of National War Services, 18 October 1940.

<sup>15</sup>LAC, DEA, RG 25, vol. 1964, file 855-E Pt II, Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Justice, to Prime Minister King, 30 May 1940.

<sup>16</sup>LAC, Ian MacKenzie fonds [hereafter IM], MG 27 III B 5, vol. 81(1), file J-25-1: Japanese in Canada problem, January 1942, R.W. Mayhew, Member for Victoria to Prime Minister King, 17 February 1942; LAC, Norman Robertson fonds, MG 30 E 163, vol. 12, file 145, E.W. Bavin, Supt. Intelligence Officer, RCMP, memo to interdepartmental committee, 22 June 1940; LAC, W.L. Mackenzie King papers, MG 26, J1, vol. 325, reel C6806, p. 276562, Olof Hanson MP to King, 1 June 1942; *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19, 20, 21, 23 May 1940; *Montreal Gazette*, 22 May 1940.

vincial Police or the RCMP without delay and gave them discretionary powers to discontinue relief assistance “to proven ‘agitators’ or ‘sympathizers’.”<sup>17</sup>

The reasons for the participation of municipal and provincial governments in anti-alien campaigns at the war’s outset are not difficult to find. Both levels of government stood to gain materially and politically from denying relief to “foreigners.” In 1939, when large numbers of Canadians were still unemployed, responsibility for relief was split among the three levels of government: municipal, provincial, and federal. When Ontario Premier Hepburn and Toronto Mayor Daly spoke out against foreign-born recipients, they may have been hoping to force the federal government to assume the costs of caring for resident aliens. The premier also may have been influenced by anti-foreign letters, such as the one from the town council of Kenora, declaring that precious resources should not be spent in wartime on the foreign-born who did not see fit to assume the responsibilities of citizenship.<sup>18</sup> Whatever their motivations, the public statements of such influential figures as the Ontario premier and the Toronto mayor were clearly inflammatory. They could not have been unaware that their official communications and public statements could fuel anti-foreign sentiments. They may even have been counting on the appeal of such sentiments to Anglo-Canadian voters.

A clear indication that more than war-created anxiety concerning enemy aliens was at work in the years between 1939 and 1941 was the vulnerability of people with accents or foreign-sounding names, even if they were born in Canada or in countries allied with Canada. These women and men lost their jobs because employment was still scarce in Canada in the early war years, and many Canadians of British descent believed that they had greater claim to them than so-called foreigners.<sup>19</sup> Their anti-foreign sentiments were based on their understanding of race, not nationality. The author of a letter to the *Windsor Daily Star*, for example, drew no distinctions among them when he asked why “the foreign element such as Italians, Jews, Russians, Pol[es were] all working and holding down good jobs, while our English-speaking boys are on welfare, walking the streets.”<sup>20</sup> Many Canadians believed that some groups of immigrants were less deserving of jobs because they did

<sup>17</sup>Ontario Archives [hereafter OA], Department of Labour Papers [hereafter DLP], RG 29-135-1-15, Enemy Aliens, E.A. Horton, Director Unemployment Relief, Memo to Municipal Clerks, Municipal Relief Administrators, Provincial Relief Administrators, 10 June 1940.

<sup>18</sup>LAC, DNWS, RG 44, vol. 36, file: “German and Italian Unemployable,” Harry Herreford, Commissioner, Dominion Unemployment Relief, to T.C. Davis, Associate Deputy Minister of National War Services, 18 October 1940. OA, Hepburn Papers [hereafter HP], RG 3-9, General Correspondence (Public), box 213, file: Public Welfare Department, Clerk, Town of Kenora to Hepburn, 11 June 1940.

<sup>19</sup>LAC, DNWS, RG 44, vol. 36, file: “German and Italian Unemployable,” T.C. Davis, Associate Deputy Minister of National War Services, to Norman McLarty, Minister of Labour, 21 December 1940.

<sup>20</sup>*Windsor Daily Star*, 22 September 1939, p. 9.

not — indeed could not — form part of the Canadian nation. Allegedly inherent, or racial, differences from Canada's two "founding races," the British and the French, relegated such workers to perpetual "foreignness."

The case of mine workers of Italian origin in Nova Scotia, dismissed from their jobs following Italy's entry into the war in June 1940, sheds light on the nature and causes of such discriminatory attitudes as well as on the hardship they created. While District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America [UMWA] voted to allow foreign-born men to return to work, Anglo-Canadian miners in two collieries refused to work with them. That summer the unemployed "foreigners" provided for themselves and their families by supplementing their small relief allowances with the produce of their gardens. By the fall of 1940, however, the workers were finding it impossible to subsist. As winter approached, their children's clothing was so threadbare that some were unable to go to school.<sup>21</sup> Clarence Gillis, Co-operative Commonwealth Federation [CCF] MP for Glace Bay South, Nova Scotia, believed that for local young Anglo-Canadian men, who had never had any work because of the Depression, Italy's participation in the war was just an excuse to throw "foreigners" out of work. They resented the fact that "such a large number of foreigners are gainfully employed while they, the natives of the country, are walking the street."<sup>22</sup>

The seriousness of this type of discrimination — even after the economic boom generated by war eliminated unemployment — came to light as part of a study conducted by the Manpower Labour Supply Investigation Committee, established in July 1941. The Committee put at 15,096 in rural Manitoba alone, the number of men of Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, and Slovak descent, who should be considered "as one" with Canadians in the war effort because they were "of the same stock as the races actively engaged in fighting the Axis Powers in Europe." Yet, even when shortages in skilled labour began to develop, "eastern" employers resisted hiring such workers. Employers interviewed for the manpower study declared that they would not hire these men "unless they are forced to do so by circumstances."<sup>23</sup> The case of the "Slavic" workers from Alberta who were unable to find skilled work in Ontario illustrates the implication of surnames as signifiers of racial difference.<sup>24</sup> In the context of wartime Canada, this perceived difference meant that

<sup>21</sup>LAC, CSB, RG 26, vol. 36, file: "German and Italian Unemployable," Clarence Gillis, CCF MP, Glace Bay South, to Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Justice, 26 September 1940.

<sup>22</sup>LAC, CSB, RG 26, vol. 36, file: "German and Italian Unemployable," Clarence Gillis, CCF MP, Glace Bay South, to Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Justice, 26 September 1940.

<sup>23</sup>LAC, RP, MG 27 III B11, vol. 113. Manpower Labour Supply Investigation. Committee's report to the Labour Coordination Committee — with appendix and index. October 1941, p. F14.

<sup>24</sup>LAC, RP, MG 27 III B11, vol. 113. Manpower Labour Supply Investigation. Committee's report to the Labour Coordination Committee — with appendix and index. October 1941, p. F31.

not only the loyalties but also the skills of Canadians bearing “foreign” names were suspect. There was a noteworthy correlation between the groups deemed unqualified to take jobs in war industries and those designated as “non-preferred” by immigration officials before the war, and admitted to Canada only to fill the least desirable jobs in agriculture, construction, domestic service, lumbering, mining, and railway maintenance.<sup>25</sup> Because such immigrants and their children had traditionally filled menial jobs, many Canadians came to question their suitability for more skilled work.<sup>26</sup> In Winnipeg employers attributed the decline in quality of job applicants to the increased numbers of “Non-Anglo-Saxons” among them.<sup>27</sup> A Toronto machinery company employer reported that 50 per cent of the persons seeking work at his gate bore foreign names, and were not employed by him.<sup>28</sup>

Canada’s leading newspapers took notice of this type of discrimination and clearly identified it as racist. In December 1941, for example, both the *Globe and Mail* and the *Montreal Star* reported the case of Myrm Chknoski, convicted in the Toronto Police Court of a breach of the National Resource Mobilization Act. The act required registration by all Canadian residents over the age of sixteen, men and women alike. The purpose of national registration was to create an inventory of the mechanical and industrial skills of Canada’s workforce, as well as of men available for home defense. Racial origin formed part of the information sought by the gov-

<sup>25</sup> According to Deputy Minister of Immigration W.J. Egan, the classification guided immigrant selection but was not publicized. *Select Standing Committee of the House of Commons. Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization. Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence and Report. In respect to the consideration of the subject of Immigration, the Immigration Act, Regulations and the work of the Department of Immigration and Colonization*, 1928. For an examination of this classification see Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada’s Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto 1994), and Brian Osborne, “‘Non-Preferred’ People: Inter-war Ukrainian Immigration to Canada,” in Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk, eds., *Canada’s Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity* (Toronto 1991), 81-103.

<sup>26</sup> John Porter pointed to the connection between immigrants’ entrance status and their subsequent placement in Canada’s “vertical mosaic,” in *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto 1965). This type of racialization in early 20th-century works such as J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates; or Coming Canadians* (Toronto 1972), and Edmund Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of War and Pay in the Camps of Canada, 1903-1914* (Toronto 1972), is well known. A dissertation written shortly after World War II on the basis of oral interviews in Manitoba illustrates the persistence of such views during the war. See P.J. Giffen, “Rural Adult Education in Manitoba,” MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1947.

<sup>27</sup> LAC, RP, MG 27 III B11, vol. 113. Manpower Labour Supply Investigation. Committee’s report to the Labour Coordination Committee — with appendix and index. October 1941, p. F6.

<sup>28</sup> LAC, RP, MG 27 III B11, vol. 113. Manpower Labour Supply Investigation. Committee’s report to the Labour Coordination Committee — with appendix and index. October 1941, p. F6.

ernment, and was duly noted on the card each worker received upon registration. In principle, only those possessing registration cards were eligible for employment. Although Chknoski complied with the Act and obtained a registration card, his “foreign-sounding name” prevented him from getting work. He was arrested and tried because in desperation he gave himself an “Anglo-Saxon” name on a second card, on which he forged the signature of a deputy registrar. A *Globe and Mail* editorial sympathized with Chknoski’s plight and ascribed the inability of men like him to obtain work to “racial prejudice.”<sup>29</sup> The *Montreal Star* also stressed that such discrimination, which was not uncommon, reflected “a state of national adolescence,” a refusal to recognize “that Canada is no longer a private preserve for Anglo-Saxons and French Canadians, but a partnership of all of the races of Europe and many of Asia, pledged to a common effort, to a common ideal and moving towards a common destiny.”<sup>30</sup>

*The Unpatriotic “Foreigner”*

The widely held — though inaccurate — belief that foreigners were not volunteering to serve overseas and were not required to train for home defense exacerbated hostility towards them. The *Vancouver Sun*, for example, reported that:

While Canadian young men are volunteering and having to enter training for home defense ... many hundreds, perhaps some thousands of alien youths are having a good time in British Columbia. They are taking the jobs of the Canadian boys. They are earning better pay than they have ever known before. They are acquiring new skills that will serve them well when the war is over. They are digging in.

The article went on to suggest that foreign-born males who could be trusted be conscripted, and those who were not trustworthy be compelled to perform some other public duty, lest this state of affairs breed racial hatred.<sup>31</sup> The complaints of some Vancouver residents that Chinese Canadians were becoming rich because of the war, and now refused to remain within the confines of Chinatown, confirmed the *Vancouver Sun*’s predictions about the intensification of racial hatred.<sup>32</sup> Without knowledge of enlistment figures, many English Canadians concluded that while their sons were away fighting, the sons of “foreigners ... stay home and make money.”<sup>33</sup> Members of the Vancouver Island Farmers’ Council, for example,

<sup>29</sup>*Globe and Mail*, 26 December 1941.

<sup>30</sup>*Montreal Star*, 30 December 1941.

<sup>31</sup>“Foreigners Dig In,” *Vancouver Sun*, 16 October 1941.

<sup>32</sup>LaViolette, *The Canadian Japanese*, 32 n. 5.

<sup>33</sup>Giffen, “Rural Adult Education in Manitoba,” 155. See also LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 982, file 15: “NSS Foreign-born persons in Canada during war,” A.M. Manson, Vancouver, to General Lafleche, Deputy Minister of DNWS, 11 October 1941. “Foreigners and Jobs,” *Saturday Night*, 24 May 1941.

maintained that “Oriental” farmers benefitted from unfair advantages over “European” farmers because they did not have to train for home defense and were not enlisting in the armed forces. “The result has been that large numbers of white farmers have had to plant their land to grass while the Oriental ... is taking up land formerly used by European farmers.”<sup>34</sup> Farmers around Cooksville, Ontario, were “stewing because their sons and husbands are in the thick of war while those damn foreigners [Jews and Italians] are running Toronto markets and fruit stands and growing rich.”<sup>35</sup> Suspicions that Jews were profiteering through black market activities instead of enlisting were especially widespread.<sup>36</sup>

### *Dangerous “Foreigners”*

Some employers found it advantageous to stoke the flames of anti-alien sentiments. Blaming “foreigners” for labour activism and unrest was a convenient way to discredit the labour movement, especially the CIO which was making inroads among Canadian workers. In 1941, when the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee [PWOC] successfully enlisted workers at the Canada Packers plant in Toronto, for example, J.S. Willis, the company’s personnel director, accused the union of attempting to sabotage the war effort by slowing down production so that “Canadian” men who could have been at the front were held back in Canada. His “proof” of the union’s disloyalty to the allied cause was the assertion that about 70 per cent of the men who chose to support the PWOC, rather than the company union already in place, were “foreigners,” and that one of their leaders, Adam Borsk, was of German origin and sympathetic to the German cause. Based on surveillance of the plant, the RCMP supported Willis’s allegations.<sup>37</sup> Police reports described Borsk as a “White Russian” Nazi sympathizer, and warned that he was in a position to set the pace of production in the plant.<sup>38</sup> Any fears about the influence of “foreigners” at Canada

<sup>34</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 632, file 77: Farm Labour Problems, Raymond W. Pincott, Secretary, Vancouver Island Farmers’ Council to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, 20 May 1941.

<sup>35</sup>LAC, Canadian Authors’ Association, MG 28 I 2, Special Projects or Awards, Writers’ War Committee, report of Mary Weekes, Cooksville, Ontario, 30 July 1943. The Writers’ War Committee, with Watson Kirkconnell as chairman, was appointed in 1942 by the Canadian Authors’ Association “to put the abilities of all Canadian authors at the disposal of the Wartime Information Board.” As part of the Committee’s efforts, writers from almost every part of Canada submitted fortnightly reports to the WIB, giving their impressions of the trend of public opinion in their districts. Watson Kirkconnell, *A Slice of Canada: Memoirs* (Toronto 1967), esp. ch. 23.

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, *Winnipeg Free Press*, 14 October 1939; Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada’s Second World War* (Vancouver 2004), 39.

<sup>37</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 638, file 202: Canada Packers Limited, J.S. Willis, Personnel Director, Canada Packers Ltd., Toronto, to Professor Gilbert Jackson, Montreal, 12 July 1941.

<sup>38</sup>LAC, Tracy Philipps fonds [hereafter TP], MG 30 E350, vol.1, file 22, Correspondence July 1941, M. Black, RCMP to Tracy Philipps, 25 July 1941.

Packers were put to rest when the CIO organizing efforts were defeated by the company's insistence that the vote on the union be conducted in all its plants, and by the dismissal of Adam Borsk.<sup>39</sup> By then, however, the publicity surrounding the case no doubt intensified suspicions against foreign-born workers.

In their effort to discredit the rival CIO, even some officials of the Canadian Federation of Labour [CFL] purported to see links between "foreigners," the CIO's organizing drives in Canada, and the threat to war production. They used the term "foreigner" to describe both American control of the CIO and the workers it sought to organize. CFL secretary-treasurer W.T. Burford claimed that the recruitment of "a thousand men, mostly foreigners and farm hands" who worked seasonally in Saskatchewan's lignite coal mines by the UMWA — a CIO affiliate — prevented the CFL from honouring its commitment to the dominion government to avoid labour disputes.<sup>40</sup> Such accusations fell on receptive ears because many Canadians believed in the political untrustworthiness, and especially proneness to radicalism, of people of southern and eastern European descent.<sup>41</sup>

### *Jews and African Canadians*

Racism was clearly at work when Canadian-born Jews and African Canadians, who could hardly be accused of harbouring loyalties to Canada's wartime enemies, were barred from certain types of employment. Such racism, of course, predated the war, but it came to light during the war because activists in these two minority groups believed that the incongruity of calling upon them to make sacrifices on behalf of the nation through enlistment, while simultaneously denying them the right to equal treatment in the labour market, created a unique opportunity to fight against racism and discrimination in Canada. For ammunition in this fight, they actively collected evidence of employment discrimination.

The Joint Public Relations Committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress and B'nai B'rith [JPRC], established in 1938 to oppose anti-Semitism specifically and racial and religious discrimination generally, decided to take action because state-owned or crown companies, as well as private industry involved in war production "consistently refused employment to Jews solely on racial or religious grounds."<sup>42</sup> The JPRC assembled copies of job application forms that included ques-

<sup>39</sup>Ross Murray, "The End of the Canada Packers Myth," *The Canadian Forum*, 21 (February 1942), 334-335.

<sup>40</sup>*Winnipeg Free Press*, 21 October 1939. The CFL was a small organization formed in the 1930s, when a few members of the All Canadian Congress of Labour left it in protest over the influx of communists.

<sup>41</sup>Donald Avery, *"Dangerous Foreigners": European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto 1979).

<sup>42</sup>OA, Drew Papers, RG 3-17, box 436, file 87-G: Fair Employment Practices Act, "Brief Presented to the National Selective Service by the Canadian Jewish Congress in 1942" [hereafter CJC Brief].



tions about the “race” and “religion” of prospective applicants, and solicited information from Jews who had experienced or witnessed employment discrimination. Despite fears that such testimony could render them unemployable, Jews in various lines of work responded. Some of them, probably those less proficient in English, provided oral accounts and then signed affidavits, while others wrote letters describing their experiences.

The cases of Hy Lampert and Gertrude Green illustrate the nature of discrimination against Jewish blue-collar workers. In 1942, Lampert responded to a newspaper advertisement for general machine shop help, in which he was trained and had some experience, at a Toronto plant. When he identified himself as Jewish in response to a question concerning his religion, he was informed that the job was filled. Yet advertisements for the same position continued to appear in Toronto newspapers. Wary of anti-Semitism, Gertrude Green inquired whether a “Jewish girl would be employed,” before going to an interview for a job at the Canadian Acme Screw and Gear in Toronto. The answer she received was unequivocal: “they had never done so and had no intentions of hiring them in the future, and therefore, I should not bother coming down to see them.”<sup>43</sup>

According to the Ontario Division of the Canadian Jewish Congress [CJC], the extent of employment discrimination against Jews was best illustrated by their “infinitesimally” small numbers in war industries.<sup>44</sup> H.M. Caiserman, of the CJC’s head office in Montreal, identified Canadian Marconi, RCA Victor, Royal Typewriters, and Canadian Car & Foundry as some of the Montreal companies not hiring Jews.<sup>45</sup> As late as the spring of 1943, the CJC claimed that, because the National Selective Service [NSS] was not sending them to jobs consonant with their skills and goals, thousands of Jewish men, boys, and girls were standing in line for hours at the Montreal Selective Service to obtain open permits which would allow them to approach places of employment on their own.<sup>46</sup>

African Canadians also publicized, and protested against, employment discrimination. War production actually somewhat reduced segregation of this group within the labour force. For example, African Canadian women, the majority of whom were forced to work as domestic servants until the 1940s, could now find employment in factories. As one of them explained, “we weren’t allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war, and then they would beg you, ‘Would you

<sup>43</sup>CJC Brief, Hy Lampert to Mr Hoffman, 31 July 1942; Gertrude Green to Mrs. Sherwin, 21 July 1942.

<sup>44</sup>CJC Brief, 2.

<sup>45</sup>Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives [hereafter CJCCNA], CJC Organizational Records, Chronological File Series [hereafter CJCCF], ZA 1943, box 3, file 26, undated confidential memorandum by H.M. Caiserman.

<sup>46</sup>CJCCNA, CJC, CJCCF, ZA 1943, box 3, file 26, H.M. Caiserman to Mrs. S. Levitt, 22 March 1943.

like a job in my factory’.”<sup>47</sup> Yet by no means did all factories welcome African Canadian workers. A *Globe and Mail* reporter discovered in October 1942 that only a small number of the 4,000 African Canadians in Toronto were able to find work in industry. Although their own acceptance of racist stereotypes played an important part in job allocation, employers sometimes blamed objections raised by other employees for this type of discrimination.<sup>48</sup> Automobile manufacturers, for example, sought Black men specifically for employment in physically demanding jobs in the powerhouse and foundries. When they found the number of African Canadian males in Ontario insufficient, they travelled to Nova Scotia in search of such workers. As for African Canadian women, racism combined with gender-based discrimination kept them out of automobile factories.<sup>49</sup>

### *White-Collar Work*

Even as a booming economy enhanced chances for upward mobility for many other Canadians starting in 1941, racism continued to block Jews, African Canadians, and people of eastern and southern European descent from white-collar occupations. Reverend Harvey Forester, superintendent of the All People’s Mission for the Niagara Peninsula, reported such discrimination in Welland, an industrial community with an exceptionally high proportion of people of eastern and southern European descent. Officials of a war plant, seeking clerical workers at the end of the school year in 1942, requested the names of the best high school graduates from the local school board, on which Forster served. The list sent by the board included the names of pupils of central European origin. “Don’t send us foreigners; send us white men!,” responded war plant officials.<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere Canadian-born teachers of eastern European descent were refused employment by “Anglo-Saxon” school boards.<sup>51</sup>

The entry of Jewish women and men into white-collar occupations was similarly restricted. During the war years, Jews were employed by state agencies. They found it difficult to obtain clerical and professional jobs in private businesses, however, even ones engaged in war production. For example, after trying unsuccessfully to enlist in the armed forces, Norman Cowan, a trained accountant, sought

<sup>47</sup>Dionne Brand, “‘We weren’t allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war’: The 1920s to the 1940s,” in Peggy Bristow et al., *‘We’re Rooted Here and They Can’t Pull Us Up’: Essays in African Canadian Women’s History* (Toronto 1994), 179.

<sup>48</sup>*Globe and Mail*, 31 October 1942. CJCCCNA, CJC, CJCCF, ZA 1943, box 3, file 22, note from Bernice Marshall, Verdun, dated 3 February 1943.

<sup>49</sup>Pamela Sugiman, “Privilege and Oppression: The Configuration of Race, Gender, and Class in Southern Ontario Auto Plants, 1939 to 1949,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 47 (Spring 2001), 89-91.

<sup>50</sup>LAC, TP, MG 30 E350, vol. 2, file 15: Eisner Report.

<sup>51</sup>*Kanadai Magyar Munkás* (Canadian Hungarian Worker), 20 August 1941, 14, and Giffen, “Rural Adult Education in Manitoba,” 157.

work in Toronto. Despite having excellent references from previous employers and auditors, Cowan was turned down by six different firms. Three of the six, including Price Waterhouse, told him outright that they did not employ Jews. Small wonder that the disappointed Cowan wrote the JPRC about a “boycott against the Jews.”<sup>52</sup>

Adeline Natanson had similar experiences. An interviewer at the war plant of the John Inglis Company in Toronto, having declared that her educational background and experience qualified her for the job, was ready to hire her as a typist. As an afterthought he inquired as to her “nationality and racial origin.” When she told him that she was Jewish, he replied that “unfortunately, for simply that reason only,” he would be unable to hire her, explaining that he had to abide by office policy. The interviewer apparently regretted turning Adeline away and tried to place her by calling a friend who managed a department of another war plant, only to discover that concerning the employment of “those of Hebrew nationality for clerical work” the Small Arms Branch adhered to the same policy as the John Inglis Company.<sup>53</sup>

African Canadians also continued to be barred from white-collar occupations. In Montreal, Janet Long, field secretary of the Girls’ Cottage School, protested publicly on behalf of “coloured girls.” “Most employers did not wish coloured employees for office work,” she stated.<sup>54</sup> Frances E. Upton, registrar and school visitor of the Association of Registered Nurses in Quebec, explained restrictive practices in nursing in Montreal by observing that if “Negroes were admitted to the profession, white mothers would decline permission to their daughters to train as nurses.” She added that coloured girls did not work as hard as white girls, did not like to be disciplined, and would not bring the same “refinement” to their jobs.<sup>55</sup> In Toronto, Black university graduates used the pages of the *Globe and Mail* to publicize their inability to obtain white-collar jobs.<sup>56</sup>

#### *State Intervention*

We will never know the precise number of those affected by dismissals, the denial of relief, and restriction to menial jobs. The problem was sufficiently great, however, to concern Canada’s Ministers of Labour, Justice, and National War Services, and such leading civil servants in Ottawa as Norman Robertson, Deputy Minister of

<sup>52</sup>CJC Brief, Norman Cowan to Mrs. Sherwin, 17 June 1942.

<sup>53</sup>CJC Brief, Adaline Natanson to Mrs. Sherwin, Jewish Employment Service, Toronto, 1 October 1942.

<sup>54</sup>*Montreal Daily Star*, 8 December 1942, cited in Harold Herbert Potter, “The Occupational Adjustments of Montreal Negroes, 1941-48,” MA thesis, McGill University, 1949, 74-75.

<sup>55</sup>Potter, “The Occupational Adjustments,” 119-120. On discrimination against Jewish and “coloured” girls in Toronto, see LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 1522, file XI-2-12-pt. 3, B.G. Sullivan to Mrs. Rex Eaton, 5 July 1943.

<sup>56</sup>*Globe and Mail*, 30 October 1942; see Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (Kingston and Montreal 1997), 422.

External Affairs, and T.C. Davis, Associate Deputy Minister of the DNWS. These officials recognized that those affected included many naturalized British subjects and so-called friendly aliens.<sup>57</sup> Officials in charge of the federal-provincial training programme also complained about employment discrimination. In November 1941, J.H. Ross, regional director for Alberta, wrote to alert R.F. Thompson, supervisor of training in Ottawa, that a difficult situation was developing in Alberta and northern Saskatchewan because employers “will not accept Canadian born trainees who are of foreign but naturalized parentage.” “This action is most unfair,” he added, because such men “are accepted without question for the Armed Forces.” Thompson in turn thought the matter grave enough to inform the Department of Munitions and Supply.<sup>58</sup> A few months later, at a conference of the training programme directors in Ottawa, several directors lamenting that those born in Canada of “non-Anglo-Saxon parentage” found it impossible to obtain employment, formally resolved to notify the proper authorities in order to end such discrimination.<sup>59</sup>

Since a large proportion of Canada’s labour force was comprised of groups facing employment discrimination, Ottawa could simply not afford to ignore their plight. Officials in the Department of External Affairs [DEA] were among the first to consider acting against employment discrimination. Although only the fate of nationals of other countries fell within their mandate, they knew that such discriminatory treatment was not limited to enemy aliens but extended to naturalized Canadians of German and Italian origin and even to Canadian residents of other European origins, “irrespective of their status under the Naturalization Act.”<sup>60</sup> By 1940, a small, interdepartmental committee under the leadership of the DEA — consisting of representatives of the DNWS, the RCMP, the Censorship Branch, the Custo-

<sup>57</sup> LAC, DNWS, RG 44, vol. 35, file: “Bureau of Public Information — Foreign Section,” Davis to H.R. McMillan, 28 February 1942; AUA, WKP, vol. 48, file 20, T.C. Davis, Associate Deputy Minister, Department of National War Services, to Professor Watson Kirkconnell, 3 January 1941.

<sup>58</sup> LAC, Department of Munitions and Supply, RG 28, vol. 144, file: Inter-Departmental Committee on Labour Co-ordination, General Correspondence, Pt 3, H.H. Kerr, Regional Director, Ontario, Dominion Provincial War Emergency Training Programme to J.H. Ross, Regional Director, Alberta, 17 November 1941; Joe H. Ross, Regional Director, Alberta, Department of Education, to Mr. Thompson, Supervisor of Training, Department of Labour, Ottawa, 24 November 1941; R.F. Thompson to A.W. Crawford, Director General of Labour Relations, DMS, 27 November 1941; LAC, Privy Council Office fonds, RG 2, vol. 6, file M5: Re: Armed Services Industry. A.D.P. Heeney analysis of manpower supply for Cabinet War Committee.

<sup>59</sup> AO, Ministry of Labour, RG 7-16-0-143: Dominion-Provincial War Emergency Training Programme — Conference Proceedings — Ottawa, 16-18 March 1942.

<sup>60</sup> LAC, DNWS, RG 44, vol. 36, file: “German and Italian Unemployable,” Memorandum of the Interdepartmental Committee on the Treatment of Aliens [by Norman Robertson], 13 August 1940.

dian of Enemy Property, and others — started meeting to explore the possibilities of enabling fuller, smoother participation of these groups in the war effort.<sup>61</sup> They focused almost exclusively on groups of European descent.

One of the first proposals of the Committee on Aliens was to create labour battalions in which men unemployable because of their nationality or “race” “could be enlisted and put to useful work of national importance for the duration of the war.” The plan both acknowledged the existence of employment discrimination and side-stepped it. The proposed battalions would be open to individuals other than enemy aliens, who “for one reason or another could not be usefully employed either in the defense forces, on essential war work or public work.” The battalions would offer advantages both to the government and to those enlisted in them. Enlistees would have the opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to Canada. The government would benefit because the battalions would provide labour in the country’s defense such as “Coast defense works, camp construction, preparation of air training fields, completion of the trans-Canada and other arterial highways, possibly even the Alaska-British Columbia highway.” These units could additionally serve as agencies for assimilating immigrants, a responsibility which according to Norman Robertson had been neglected by the Canadian government. In the end this plan was not adopted, probably owing to fears that the battalions would displace other workers and thus intensify resentment against “foreigners.”<sup>62</sup>

Another early plan called for the Minister of Labour to approach employers through the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and the Canadian Association of Boards of Trade, as well as labour unions, to put a stop to employment discrimination against workers of foreign extraction.<sup>63</sup> On 14 March 1941, the Department of Labour issued a circular urging employers and secretaries of trade unions not to discriminate against persons of foreign name or birth, whether citizens or residents, so long as they had demonstrated unquestioned loyalty to Canada.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup>LAC, Robert England fonds, MG 30 C181, vol. 3, file: Report on the Reorganization of Nationalities Branch, Department of National War Services, by Robert England, 12 June 1944.

<sup>62</sup>LAC, DNWS, RG 44, vol. 36, file: “German and Italian Unemployable,” memorandum to Labour Co-ordination Committee from A.W. Crawford and W.J. Couper, re: Discrimination in employment against certain nationality groups by war industries, 13 January 1942. The plan is discussed in Dreisziger, “The Rise of a Bureaucracy for Multiculturalism.”

<sup>63</sup>LAC, DNWS, RG 44, vol. 36, file: “German and Italian Unemployable,” T.C. Davis, Associate Deputy Minister, DNWS to Norman McLarty, Minister of Labour, 21 December 1940.

<sup>64</sup>LAC, DNWS, RG 44, vol. 36, file: “German and Italian Unemployable,” to Employers of Labour and Secretaries of Trade Unions from N.A. McLarty, Minister of Labour, 14 March 1941, “Re — Employment of Citizens and Aliens.”

These state plans, however, were designed to deal only with the problems of workers of European descent. Although the circular stated that the help of “various nationalities ... regardless of creed or racial origin” would be required to win the war, the fate of people of Asian origin — Japanese Canadians especially — was considered separately throughout the war. This was ostensibly because their situation was different — most were concentrated in British Columbia. In fact, however, their distinct treatment had to do with the intensity of racism against Asian Canadians. The Committee on the Treatment of Aliens and Alien Property, for example, stated that the loyalties of Japanese Canadians were “racial not national.”<sup>65</sup> A Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia considered the establishment of separate civilian labour battalions for Japanese Canadians, after it decided that Chinese Canadians, “East Indians,” and Canadian-born and naturalized people of Japanese descent should not be trained for home defense, because an obligation to participate in such training would entitle them to enfranchisement. Committee members most sympathetic to Canadians of Asian origin, such as Professor Henry Angus of the University of British Columbia, were the strongest supporters of the civilian battalion plan. Angus believed that such service would show the world that Canada was not racist and prove to Canadians that people of Japanese origin “wished the triumph of the democratic countries.” Debates over remuneration, however, led first to the postponement and eventually to the abandonment of the formation of the battalions.<sup>66</sup>

Racism against people of Asian descent was also a key reason for Ottawa’s failure to consider legislative remedies for employment discrimination. In 1942, when the Department of Labour proposed an order in council that would prohibit racial discrimination in war industries, Henry Angus, now an official of the Department of External Affairs, advised that such an order would conflict with pre-war provincial legislation limiting the employment of “persons of the Chinese race” and limiting the employment of “persons of other races by Chinese.” Angus added that such an order would place employers in a difficult situation if their employees, customers or communities harboured racist attitudes toward Japanese Canadians.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup>LAC, Ian MacKenzie fonds, MG 27 III B5, vol. 32, file X-52, Committee on the Treatment of Aliens and Alien Property, first interim report and file 81 (1) Japanese in Canada problem, January 1942, “Meeting to consider questions concerned with Canadian Japanese and Japanese Nationals in BC, 8 January 1942.”

<sup>66</sup>LAC, DEA, RG 25, vol. 3005, file 3464-T-40 Civilian Labour Force, Memorandum for Mr. Robertson re the proposed order-in-council postponing the formation of the Canadian Japanese Construction Corps, from HFA [Henry Angus] 1 April 1942; LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 1500, file 2-K-184 NSS Orientals, “Report and Recommendation of the Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia, December 1940”; *Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia, Reports and Recommendations*, 1940.

<sup>67</sup>LAC, DEA, RG 25, box 3008, file 3542-40, H.F. Angus to W.J. Couper, Department of Labour, 28 August 1942.

*State Complicity*

Not only did government officials not stop racist employment discrimination, they in fact actively colluded in racist practices, including ones that targeted people of eastern and southern European descent. As we have seen, the directors of the Emergency War Training Programme complained in 1941 that racist employment practices undermined the efficacy of the programme. But instead of challenging such exclusion, officials in charge of vocational training in some cases reinforced it by barring members of some racialized minority groups. During the first two years of the war, for example, some of those who trained young men for skilled work in the armed services believed there was no point in training “Asiatics” and members of the “coloured races” since they would not be admitted into the RCAF in any event.<sup>68</sup> In 1942, employment discrimination led those in charge of training in Toronto to classify “Jews, Negroes, Chinese” as “problem cases,” along with “Canadian children not of British origin (e.g., Canadian children of Italian or German origin),” “people with relatives in the warring countries,” and “people with foreign-sounding names.” In order not to “waste time and money,” applicants from these groups were admitted to the training programmes only if they were sponsored by future employers.<sup>69</sup> Thus, minority workers could not always avail themselves of government training programmes to move out of the marginalized sectors of the economy to which they had been relegated.

Officials of the NSS, an agency established in 1942 to mobilize and ensure the most efficient use of the civilian labour force in war production, also collaborated with discriminatory employers, as did employees of the Unemployment Insurance Commission [UIC] whose offices were formally incorporated into the NSS structure. In principle every potential worker required the permission of an NSS officer to enter any employment, including changing jobs. Recent research suggests that many Canadians ignored NSS officers altogether, moving from one job to another on their own.<sup>70</sup> But some minority workers whose occupational mobility was constrained by racism attempted to use government offices to find better jobs. All too frequently they were sorely disappointed.

Guided by prevailing racial stereotypes, some NSS officials used information on “racial origin” to discriminate against minority group members. In Windsor, for example, although the United Auto Workers district council pointed out that “Chinese” were “doing an excellent job of work in Ford,” NSS officials were sending

<sup>68</sup>OA, RG 7-16-0-93, R.F. Thompson, Supervisor of Youth Training to J.F. Marsh, Department of Labour, 2 May 1940.

<sup>69</sup>CJC brief, M.W. Wright to Martin Cohn, CJC, 22 January 1942; Confidential, the Board of Education, Toronto, 19 March 1942. Sponsored classes in 4 Vocational Toronto Schools.

<sup>70</sup>Michael D. Stevenson, *Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle: National Selective Service and the Mobilization of Human Resources during World War II* (Montreal and Kingston 2001), 20, 122-123.



Chinese workers to work in restaurants and laundries.<sup>71</sup> In Montreal, an NSS officer who was trying to rehabilitate Italians released from internment in 1943 maintained that "Italians are adaptable to foundries, smelters and such kind of work." He added that placing Italian workers in this type of heavy labour would not only give them the opportunity to earn decent wages but also help to "relieve a shortage of certain fields for which they are most suitable."<sup>72</sup> Racist stereotypes were even more damaging in the case of African Canadians. When the executive director of the Negro Community Centre in Montreal consulted the head of the city's NSS about employment of African Canadians, he was told, "I can't do anything for your people, their I.Q. is too low."<sup>73</sup> Such attitudes no doubt explained why "coloured boys and girls" were being offered "menial jobs, without regard for qualifications."<sup>74</sup> Anti-Semitism led some NSS officials in Montreal to direct Jewish applicants only to jobs in "lower or lowest brackets."<sup>75</sup> It could not have been irrelevant in all these cases, that the lower-paid, lower status occupations were becoming more and more difficult to fill.

To be sure, not all NSS officials were racist. Some of them even belonged to racialized minority groups. A few Anglo-Canadian officials, moreover, spoke up against racist discrimination. For example, Verna McClure, an employment and claims officer for NSS, chaired the London Japanese Advisory Committee, which protested against racism that prevented Japanese Canadians from contributing to national life by earning a living in the occupations for which their training and experience qualified them.<sup>76</sup> Some Montreal NSS officials, not all of them Jewish, supplied the Canadian Jewish Congress with evidence of the anti-Semitic attitudes of their colleagues and with lists of employers who specified that they were unwilling to employ Jews.<sup>77</sup>

Many more state officials, however, who may or may not have subscribed to racist ideas, accepted such requests as "no aliens and no Jews" from prospective

<sup>71</sup>Walter Reuther Library, United Auto Workers Toronto Sub-Regional Office, box 11, file: Meeting November 1943. Minutes of District Council 26, 7-8 November 1942.

<sup>72</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 998, file 2-114-6, NSS Employment of Released Italian Internees L.M. Lymburner, Jr., NSS Officer, Montreal, to A. MacNamara, Deputy Minister of Labour, and Director NSS, 2 March 1943.

<sup>73</sup>Potter, "The Occupational Adjustments," 70.

<sup>74</sup>Potter, "The Occupational Adjustments," 71.

<sup>75</sup>CJCCCNA, CJCCF, ZA 1943, box 3, file 26, Conversation with Mr. Shecter of the National Selective [sic] of Montreal H.M. Caiserman, 11 March 1943.

<sup>76</sup>LAC, DEA, RG 25, vol. 3005, file 3464-V-40. London Japanese Advisory Committee to Prime Minister King, 29 June 1944.

<sup>77</sup>CJCCCNA, CJC, CJCCF, ZA 1943, box 3, file 26, confidential memo; CJCCCNA, CJCCF, ZA 1943, box 3, file 26; Conversation with Mr. Shecter of the National Selective [sic] of Montreal H.M. Caiserman, 11 March 1943.

employers.<sup>78</sup> The clearest evidence of such official collusion came from Jewish employers who sought to fill positions through the NSS or the UIC. UIC employees asked prospective employer J.H. Gringorten of Canada Motor Products Limited in Toronto, a plant for the assembly of aircraft and automobile fuses, on several occasions, “whether nationality made any difference,” and upon receiving a negative response, added “not even if they are Jewish?” These questions troubled Gringorten, who believed that they planted the idea of discriminating against prospective Jewish employees in the minds of otherwise neutral employers. When he confronted one of the officials, she explained that the questions were asked in the interest of the Jewish applicants, “who all too often have been sent to places whose practice was to discriminate against them, and it simply meant a waste of time and carfare and general disillusionment for the applicant.”<sup>79</sup>

Targeted minorities, especially Jews and African Canadians, protested against such discrimination. In November 1942, representatives of labour unions with large Jewish memberships such as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Fur Workers Union, along with community activists, presented evidence of discrimination against Jews to Elliott M. Little, who as chief of the Selective Service Board stood at the helm of civilian and military mobilization in Canada. Percy Bengough, acting president of the Dominion Trades Congress, accompanied the delegation. African Canadian community organizations, church groups, and youth clubs similarly publicized discrimination through interviews with the press, petitions and delegations to the federal and provincial governments. Given what we know about the complicity of their employees in racist employment practices, the skepticism with which NSS authorities initially greeted these allegations appears disingenuous, to say the least.<sup>80</sup> The ensuing publicity nevertheless convinced the NSS to warn employers that it would not tolerate discrimination “for reasons of race, color or creed.”<sup>81</sup> It prohibited the inclusion of questions concerning race and religion on official registration and employment forms and warned employers that “the practice of discrimination” might mean a “shutting off of all labor supplies for their plants.”<sup>82</sup>

Even after such classification on official forms was prohibited, however, employers continued to express their racial preferences, and NSS officials attempted to comply. They inquired about the background of applicants not in writing, however,

<sup>78</sup> CJCCCNA, CJCCF, ZA 1942, box 5, file 57, Affidavit by Simon Yasin, 9 September 1942.

<sup>79</sup> CJC Brief, J.H. Gringorten to Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, 2 October 1942.

<sup>80</sup> *Ottawa Evening Journal*, 13 October 1942, “Want Congress to Substantiate Charge Made.”

<sup>81</sup> CJCCCNA, CJCCF, ZA 1943, box 3, file 26, Selective Service Circular No. 81, “Discrimination in Employment.” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 14 October 1942. “Race Prejudice Stories Result in Ottawa Step,” Clipping, Spectator Collection.

<sup>82</sup> *Globe and Mail*, 16 November 1942.

but over the telephone or during interviews. About a year after discrimination based on race was officially prohibited, the Director of NSS issued an internal directive encouraging such collusion with racist requirements of employers. The new directive suggested that applying the anti-discrimination provisions too rigidly had "caused embarrassment both to applicants and employers." "Where good judgement would indicate that there is some possibility of real difficulty in the assimilation of the applicant into the organization of the prospective employer," the instructions suggested, "a preliminary enquiry should be made preferably by telephone to determine whether there are insurmountable obstacles in the way of acceptance of the applicant."<sup>83</sup>

Whatever the motivation of NSS officials, state intervention in the labour market in wartime Canada had the effect of reinforcing the racialization of minority workers. As late as 1943, H.C. Stratton, Manager of the Unemployment Insurance Commission in Windsor, seemed to see nothing wrong with following racist instructions received from prospective employers. In response to a complaint from Alvin McCurdy, president of the African Canadian Amherstburg Community Club, Stratton explained that when employers placed "an order in this office for their help requirement and specify age, weight, height, sometimes religion, race, etc," officers of the Commission had "to choose applicants to meet these requirements the best we can before making referrals." "I think you will see that our hands are more or less tied," he added, "because we are only a bureau to bring together the employee and employer, and according to our present regulations we still have not the right to insist that the employer must take any particular person, so that if an applicant calls at this office we can only place them in proportion to the orders on hand and considering the qualifications to fill that particular job."<sup>84</sup>

Equally blatant was state complicity with efforts to channel Chinese, Japanese, and Native Canadians into farm labour, lumber work, light industries, and service jobs, precisely those sectors of the economy that other groups were abandoning for more lucrative employment elsewhere. Although skilled and white-collar jobs in many parts of Canada remained closed to Jews and other minorities from eastern and southern Europe, and to African Canadians, by 1942 the expanding wartime economy did offer them some new employment opportunities. Such workers could and did abandon seasonal or temporary, ill-paid, dangerous jobs or those in isolated areas, to which they were relegated before the war, in favour of more regular, better-paid work in war industries. Women who had earned a living as domestic

<sup>83</sup>Ontario Jewish Archives [OJA], JCRC, MG 8 S, file 78, NSS Circular No. 81A, Discrimination in Employment. For a discussion of the new instructions see CJCCCNA, CJCCF, ZA1943, box 3, file 26, Louis Rosenberg to Saul Hayes, 24 February 1944; LAC, Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada Collection, Records of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Western Division, MG 28, V 114, vol. 3, file: Executive, Louis Rosenberg, 1944.

<sup>84</sup>OA, Amherstburg Community Club papers, H.C. Stratton, Manager of the Unemployment Insurance Commission in Windsor, to Alvin McCurdy, president of the ACC, 28 May 1943.

servants, in seasonal employment picking fruits and vegetables, or working in canneries, now sought employment in factories. Women and men who worked in low-paid jobs in the textile, clothing, and food processing industries also moved to better-paid jobs in war industries. Men from remote mining communities and lumber camps sought employment in urban areas. Their ranks were joined by men and women migrating to central Canada from less industrialized prairie and maritime provinces.<sup>85</sup>

Consequently, serious labour shortages developed in agriculture, food processing, lumbering, mining, railroad maintenance, and the service sector — the very sectors staffed by “non-preferred” immigrants before the war.<sup>86</sup> Since the war had put a stop to immigration, worried government officials were desperately searching for new sources of labour to fill such jobs. Alarmed by crops left rotting in the fields, uncultivated farm lands, the closure of food processing plants, and declining production in the resource sector, state officials increasingly turned to those groups most marginalized by racism in the Canadian economy.

In the case of Chinese Canadians, the state’s desperation to fill various undesirable jobs was at least partly responsible for Ottawa’s failure to tackle the resentment created by their exclusion from training for home defense. NSS Director Arthur MacNamara argued in 1943 that “Chinese” were probably more useful in civilian jobs than they would be in the military. A year later, just before some Chinese Canadians were recruited to help with covert operations in the Pacific, MacNamara still proposed that perhaps they should be called up, found unfit, and then sent to NSS for alternative service. The advantage of such a plan would be that those designated for such work would be obligated to stick with it.<sup>87</sup>

### *Japanese Canadians*

In the case of Japanese Canadians state collusion with racist attitudes, policies, and practices was even more flagrant. Here racist attitudes eventually converged with labour needs. After the removal of Japanese Canadians from coastal British Columbia deprived them of their means of livelihood, the British Columbia Security Commission [BCSC], charged with the removal, faced a Herculean task: to make Japanese Canadians self-supporting so they would not constitute a financial burden for the federal government, when most Canadian communities adamantly opposed

<sup>85</sup>LAC, RP, MG 27 III B11, vol. 113, Manpower Labour Supply Investigation. Committee’s Report to the Labour Coordination Committee, October 1941. LAC, RG 27, DL, vol. 980, file: NSS Minutes Advisory Board, NSS 1943-4.

<sup>86</sup>LAC, RP, MG 27 III B11, vol. 113, Manpower Labour Supply Investigation. Committee’s report to the Labour Coordination Committee, October 1941, pp. 91-96. LAC, RG 27, DL, Labour, vol. 632, file 77, “Farm Labour Patterns,” vol. 975, file 1: NSS Canning.

<sup>87</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 998, file: “NSS Aliens, Chinese,” Minutes of Meeting in Office of Brigadier Sutherland, D.A.G. 26 March 1943; LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 999, file 2-114-15 “NSS Aliens Chinese,” A. MacNamara to A.M. Manson, 5 May 1944.

the settlement of Japanese Canadians within their boundaries. Its initial plan entailed the separation of families. Women, children and unemployable men were moved into ghost towns in the interior of British Columbia. Only a few men of prime working age were allowed to accompany them, to make the towns liveable. Most Japanese Canadian men between the ages of 18 and 45, whether Japanese nationals, naturalized or Canadian-born, were moved to road camps. Canadians who refused to let the men move into their communities were quite happy to allow them to build new highways under strict government supervision. The men were expected to stay in the road camps, unless given permission to leave by the RCMP. They were not free to take commercial employment, and were required to assign \$20 from their monthly earnings (unskilled labourers earned 25 cents per hour) for the maintenance of their dependants, a sum supplemented by the government by no more than \$5 per dependent child per month.<sup>88</sup>

At the time of the evacuation, the only way that Japanese Canadian families could stay together was to agree to go to the sugar beet fields of Alberta and Manitoba.<sup>89</sup> Nearly 4,000 Japanese Canadians were sent to such fields in Alberta, Manitoba, and eventually Ontario.<sup>90</sup> Because the work was seasonal, the Japanese Canadians required either additional work or government assistance for part of each year. Initially, only males could find such work in northern lumber camps. Although work deemed appropriate for women, in canning and domestic service, was available in communities near the beet fields, Japanese Canadian women could not take up this work because they were formally excluded from such communities as Lethbridge.<sup>91</sup> Eventually, some communities did allow Japanese Canadians to undertake some of this work, in canning factories, for example, on condition that they return to sugar beet farms at the end of the work season.<sup>92</sup>

The BCSG and the Department of Labour allowed a small number of British Columbia's Japanese Canadians to move east of the Rocky Mountains on their own. To allay public fears, however, all people of Japanese descent required travel permits to change residence or travel across provincial boundaries. To prevent permanent settlement, they were prohibited from purchasing or leasing land or growing

<sup>88</sup>LAC, DEA, RG 25, box 1964, file 855-E-39 part 2, Order in Council, P.C. 1348, 29 February 1942.

<sup>89</sup>On the nature of beet work and the difficulty of labour recruitment in this field before World War II, see John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, "Workers, Growers and Monopolists: The 'Labour Problem' in the Alberta Beet Sugar Industry," *Labour/Le Travail*, 3 (1978), 153-174.

<sup>90</sup>LaViolette, *The Canadian Japanese*, 74.

<sup>91</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 170, file 614.02:11 Re: Placement of Certain Japanese Families in the Province of Alberta, vol. 2, Japanese conditions in Canada generally, 21 October 1943, Report by Const. J.S. Connor, RCMP, Lethbridge. Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of Japanese Canadians* (Toronto 1976), 281.

<sup>92</sup>Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was*, 282.

crops. Those who chose to move east faced additional restrictions from local authorities. Particularly onerous for the small business owners among them was the refusal to issue business licenses to Japanese Canadians. Such formal restrictions combined with great difficulty in finding employment and housing to make Japanese Canadians dependent on government plans for them.

By the end of 1942, at least in part because of the development of great shortages of labour throughout Canada, the federal government decided that “dispersal” east of the Rocky mountains, especially in areas of lumbering and agriculture, was the solution to the Japanese Canadian problem. State officials chose to place Japanese Canadians in localities and occupations where they would not “compete seriously with white workers” and where they would not be required to meet the public regularly. Occupations for young women initially included domestic work, basketmaking, dress factories, laundries, and canneries, and for young men gardening, domestic work, truck driving, painting, or work in garages, tanneries, foundries, lumbering, or railway work as section men and repairmen.<sup>93</sup> Plans for Japanese Canadian families included settlement on abandoned farms, where they would grow specialized crops. These were largely the jobs abandoned by all who could find more lucrative employment in war production. As one BCSC official put it, the Japanese Canadians “have been and are being placed in industries where we have found it utterly impossible to find suitable labour.” “None of the positions,” he added, “are at all classified as attractive,” pointing out that the Japanese Canadians could remain at these jobs even after the war, because they would not have displaced other workers.<sup>94</sup>

Federal government officials — even those who protested that these workers could not be treated like indentured labour — at times used travel permit requirements to direct Japanese Canadians to or keep them in undesirable jobs. They advised, for example, that travel documents could be withheld from families seeking to leave sugar beet fields in Manitoba.<sup>95</sup> In principle, of course, all Canadians of working age required permission to change employment starting in 1943. But while many other Canadians ignored this requirement, Japanese Canadians could not do so.<sup>96</sup> The case of Hikowo Masuda offers a dramatic illustration of the consequences of defying restrictions on their movements. Masuda, a shipyard designer by profes-

<sup>93</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 644, file 23-2-3-7-1 pt. 1, “Placement and Relocation, Southern Ontario,” Mactavish, Acting Eastern Supervisor, BCSC to George Collins, Commissioner, BCSC, 15 January 1944.

<sup>94</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 644, file 23-2-3-7-1 pt. 1, J. Macdonald, Japanese Placement Officer, Unemployment Insurance Commission, to A. MacNamara, Director National Selective Service, 30 October 1943 [?].

<sup>95</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 170, file 614.02:11 Transference of Japanese from BC to Province of Manitoba, vol. 2, from 1 December 1942, R.H. Brown (Commissioner’s representative for Manitoba) to MacNamara, 22 March 1943.

<sup>96</sup>Stevenson, *Canada’s Greatest Wartime Muddle*, 35.

sion, was scheduled to work on building the trans-Canada highway near Scheiber, Ontario. Angered by the restriction of Japanese Canadians to such menial jobs, he travelled to Montreal instead, where he was arrested and tried for lacking the required permit. The presiding judge described his behaviour as indicative of the untrustworthiness of the “Japanese,” and sentenced him to an internment camp for having failed to report to Scheiber.<sup>97</sup>

Not surprisingly, Reverend K. Shimizu, the United Church minister serving Japanese Canadians in southern Ontario and Montreal, reported in June 1944 that occupational maladjustment was one of the main reasons that Japanese Canadians were not satisfactorily resettled. They could not engage in independent enterprise and very few white-collar jobs were open to them. Because “every Japanese Canadian has been reduced to being a wage-earner,” he noted, almost all of them regarded their present jobs as temporary, and the “feeling of ‘temporariness’ in the most basic need of man — earning one’s living — is not conducive to settlement.”<sup>98</sup>

Despite the degree of state control over them, Japanese Canadians attempted to resist such policies. Resistance in British Columbia, for example, threatened to undermine the government’s plans for dispersal. Japanese Canadians who ventured east wrote letters warning those still in the British Columbia interior about the hard labour required in the beet fields in Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario, and the lumber camps in Ontario, and about the hostile reception they could expect. They also knew that even if they agreed to go east and attempted to rebuild their lives there, they could be forced to leave at war’s end. Facing passive resistance and fearing sit-down strikes, state officials campaigned to make relocation more attractive. They tried to rescind guarantees to remove Japanese Canadians from any community that requested it. They also tried to find work more appropriate to the experience and training of Japanese Canadians. Although they suspected that this would be difficult, they believed that men might be more willing to accept beet work, lumbering, and railway section work, if they were promised that they could move on when more suitable jobs came up.<sup>99</sup>

### *Native People*

The other racialized group of workers over whom the state exercised an exceptional degree of control was Aboriginal peoples. Although all First Nations were still officially wards of the federal government during the war years, and some state offi-

<sup>97</sup>*Montreal Gazette*, 14 September 1943.

<sup>98</sup>United Church Archives, Board of Home Missions, General Files, box 27, file 446, “Report made by Rev. K. Shimizu on resettlement of Japanese Canadians, 21 June 1944.”

<sup>99</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 169, file 614.02:11: MacNamara to J.M. Wardle, Directory, Surveys and Engineering Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, 2 June 1943; LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 169, file 614.02:11, Collins to MacNamara, 13 March 1943; LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 169, file 614.02:11 MacNamara to George Collins, 26 April 1943; RG 27, DL, vol. 169, file 614.02:11: MacNamara to Collins, BCSC, 28 April 1943.



cials viewed them as so marginal to the economy that they exempted “Indians” from national registration, their employment patterns, and hence the ability of the Indian Affairs Branch [IAB] to control their participation in the labour force, varied greatly. By the 1940s, Native peoples who lived in proximity to white settlements in Canada and the northern United States had well-established traditions of working for wages away from their reserves. These patterns continued and even strengthened during the war. They worked in steel plants in Sorel, Sault St. Marie, and Michigan; an aluminum plant in Massena, New York; a foundry in Fort William; Munition Plants in Owen Sound and New Toronto; a synthetic rubber plant and other industries in Sarnia; harvesting wheat on the Prairies and hops in Oregon; and fishing, ranching, and shipyards in British Columbia. In some areas where Native people had been denied employment during the Great Depression on the grounds that they were the responsibility of the federal government, labour shortages now reopened doors to them.<sup>100</sup>

On remote reserves, however, poverty was so great that Native people seeking employment away from home were unable to relocate without IAB assistance. On one reserve in Saskatchewan, for example, large numbers of girls and women wanted to work in war industries in Ontario, but only two of them actually managed to go to Kingston because their parents could afford to pay their fares. Some Native people in Saskatchewan lacked the necessary funds to buy appropriate work clothing after they paid train fares to eastern Canada.<sup>101</sup> In such cases, the goals and prejudices of local agents and IAB bureaucrats could shape employment patterns of Native people. Thus, for example, when two young women from Maniwaki, Quebec, expressed an interest in war work, IAB Superintendent of Welfare and Training, R.A. Hoey, responded that their limited education best suited them to work as domestics. A year later, when non-Native women — including married women with children — were actively recruited and trained for work in war industries, his response to inquiries from Native women in Moose Factory was the same. Such IAB views prevented Native women from taking advantage of the war situation to obtain new skills and higher wages.<sup>102</sup> The bureaucrats were far more concerned with ensuring that their wards would not be dependent on relief, and with satisfying labour priorities, than with opening new opportunities for Native people. Many of them also believed that Native people were inherently suited only for menial tasks.

<sup>100</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 1485, file 2-153 pt. 2, DNWS, Native Indians, Memorandum, W.S. Arneil, Inspector of Indian Agencies, to Dr. McGill on Indian Reserves and Indian administration in Nova Scotia, 23 August 1941.

<sup>101</sup>LAC, Department of Indian Affairs fonds [hereafter DIA], RG 10, vol. 3236, file 600,337. M. Christianson to T.R.L. MacInnes, Secretary of Indian Affairs Branch, 7 November 1941.

<sup>102</sup>LAC, DIA, RG 10, vol. 2326, file 600,337, J.P.B. Ostrander, Indian Agent, Battleford, Saskatchewan, to M. Christianson, General Superintendent of Indian Agencies, Regina, 6 November 1941.

Although they believed that wage work in lumbering would “look like heaven to Indians,” IAB officials had so little confidence in the abilities and industry of Native workers that they agreed only with great reluctance to pay the way of a small group from the Red Pheasant Reserve in Saskatchewan to Kapuskasing, where the Spruce Falls Pulp and Paper Company was desperately short of workers. The white men who had worked there seasonally before the war had been lured to the south by better prospects.<sup>103</sup> The reluctance of IAB officials was based on an unsuccessful arrangement with an Ontario lumber company a few years earlier, when Native workers failed to remain on the job for an entire season. Instead of recognizing that labour turn-over — whatever the workers’ background — was a widespread problem in lumbering, the officials ascribed the failure of the earlier experiment to the character of “Indians.”<sup>104</sup>

When the Spruce Falls company expressed great satisfaction with the workers from the Red Pheasant Reserve and sought many more Native workers, the IAB made the necessary arrangements. IAB officials still worried, however, that the men would not on their own initiative use their wages to support their families, who would continue to depend on relief from the IAB. Unless they “are willing to assign 20 to 30 dollars a month to their families,” wrote one official, “little benefit will accrue to the Department from this experiment.” Accordingly, the employer sent some of the men’s wages directly to their families and, to ensure that the men stayed on the job, retained the remainder until the season’s end. Only then was their trip home paid for and their remaining wages handed over to the Indian agent on their reserve.<sup>105</sup>

By contrast, the IAB was quite willing to pay the costs of sending Native labourers to the sugar beet fields of Manitoba, where harvesting was especially difficult because heavy soil on low-lying lands clung to beet roots. The Japanese Canadians who had been sent there earlier were unable to support themselves despite hard labour.<sup>106</sup> Yet Superintendent Hoey believed that this was work to which “the Indians ... could readily adapt themselves, and the experience gained would no doubt prove very valuable.” In fact, however, probably because Japanese Canadians worked in sugar beets, Native people were not used extensively in the fields until after World War II.<sup>107</sup> The IAB was also willing to recruit and pay the

<sup>103</sup>LAC, DIA, RG 10, vol. 7236, file 600,337, J.P.B. Ostrander, Indian Agent, Battleford, Saskatchewan, to M. Christianson, General Superintendent of Indian Agencies, Regina, 6 November 1941.

<sup>104</sup>LAC, DIA, RG 10, vol. 7236, file 600,337.

<sup>105</sup>LAC, DIA, RG 10, vol. 7236, file 600,337.

<sup>106</sup>LAC, DL, RG 27, vol. 170, 614.01. 11 “Transference of Japanese from B.C. to Man., vol. 1, RCMP Report concerning Sugar Beet workers strike against Manitoba Sugar Co. in Fort Garry, Manitoba, 2-3 October 1942.”

<sup>107</sup>For reliance on Native labour after the war, see Ron Laliberte and Vic Satzewich, “Native Migrant Labour in the Southern Alberta Sugar-beet Industry: Coercion and Paternalism in

transportation costs of Native labourers from northern reserves to harvest other crops in the south. But although newspapers wrote in glowing terms about the contributions of Natives as agricultural labourers, even in this sector they encountered deep prejudices. Edna Jaques, reporting to the Writers' War Committee from Alberta, expressed views prevailing around Edmonton: "You know as well as I do, how much work an Indian will do. In a pinch, he works about three hours and then you can't find him. Yet they are talking of sending Indians to help the farmers in the spring."<sup>108</sup>

In some cases, the view of Native workers as shiftless and undependable may have been related to white perception of their preference for casual employment which could be combined with their own seasonal round of work.<sup>109</sup> In the Kenora district, for example, Native workers were willing enough to work as track men provided that they would be allowed to return to trapping, which provided better income, in season. There was no great difference between their pattern of employment and that of farmers who took up other types of work in winter on condition that they would be able to return to farming in the spring. In the case of the track men, employers were so short of workers that they were willing to be flexible vis-à-vis their Native employees. In other sectors, the non-acquisitive attitude of Native people toward work continued to create problems. In some cases, they simply left their jobs once they earned a certain amount of money. Insensitive to cultural differences, employers and some officials of IAB ascribed this behaviour to inherent or racial attributes of Indians.

Toward the end of the war, the participation of Native workers in war production seemed to transform the perceptions of employers and IAB officials.<sup>110</sup> Some employers and nutrition experts recognized that malnutrition had at times been the

---

the Recruitment of Labour," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 26 (February 1999), 65-85.

<sup>108</sup>LAC, Canadian Authors' Association, MG 28 I 2, Special Projects or Awards, Writers' War Committee, file: Edmonton district reports from Edna Jaques, n.d.; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 12 March 1943.

<sup>109</sup>Steven High, "Native Wage Labour and Independent Production during the 'Era of Irrelevance'," *Labour/Le Travail*, 37 (Spring 1996), 243-264.

<sup>110</sup>My attention was drawn to these discussions by Vic Satzewich, "Indian Agents and the 'Indian Problem' in Canada in 1946: Reconsidering the Theory of Coercive Tutelage," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 17 (1997), 227-257. LAC, DIA, RG 10, vol. 6771, file 452-32 Pt 2, Reel C-8515, Correspondence Regarding Post War Rehabilitation for Returned Indian Soldiers, R.S. Davis, Indian Agent, Touchewood Indian Agency, report for the month of December 1943. For a detailed study of changing attitudes toward Native people during the war see R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War* (Vancouver 2004).

cause of what appeared to be laziness and indolence among Native people.<sup>111</sup> Officials on the west coast of British Columbia discouraged Native men from enlisting “because they were of far more value to the country to take the place of the Japanese in the fishing industry.”<sup>112</sup> The Indian Agent in Williams Lake, in the interior of British Columbia, reported after the war that 90 per cent of the labour required for cattle shipped out of the Cariboo during the war was provided by Native people.<sup>113</sup> Such approbation was echoed in Ontario as well. Gifford Swartman, Indian Agent from Sioux Lookout, reported that, according to local mine managers, only the labour of Native people kept the mines from closing during the war. The war years also witnessed the development of better understanding of the tremendous variation in Native people’s employment patterns, which depended in part on their access to wage labour.

So deeply rooted was the view of Native workers’ inferiority, however, that despite this recognition of their important contribution to the war effort and the serious constraints under which Native workers operated, IAB officials simply accepted that in the more competitive post-war labour market, the “Indian” would be the “first man to lose his job” and the “last to get it,”<sup>114</sup> and that Native people would have to rely on trapping and handicrafts for their livelihood. Some officials presented these prospects in positive terms by suggesting that trapping was the chosen occupation of Native men, the only life they knew, and one they found appealing because their friends and relatives were in the “wilds.” Others acknowledged that Native workers would return to trapping not by choice but because “competition in more preferred employment” would force them to.<sup>115</sup> These observers recognized that only the very old and those suffering from physical disabilities were willing to engage in handicrafts when other types of employment were available. But this did not stop them from believing that, after the war, handicraft work would be a suitable source of employment for “Indians.”<sup>116</sup>

### Conclusion

This examination of the fate of racialized minority groups in the labour market between 1939 and 1945 reveals that the crisis of war reinforced pre-existing social

<sup>111</sup>*Special Standing Committee on Reconstruction and Reestablishment, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence No. 8* (Standing Committee), (Ottawa 1944), testimony of D.J. Allan, Indian Affairs Branch, 242-243.

<sup>112</sup>*Special Standing Committee on Reconstruction*, 242-243.

<sup>113</sup>Satzewich, “Indian Agents.” LAC, DIA, RG 10, vol. 6811, file 470-2-8 Pt. 1, reel C-8534 W.M. Christie, Indian Agent, Williams Lake, B.C., to Glen, 5 February 1946.

<sup>114</sup>*Special Standing Committee on Reconstruction*, testimony of D.J. Allan, superintendent of Reserves and Trust Service, IAB, 243.

<sup>115</sup>*Special Standing Committee on Reconstruction*, testimony of D.J. Allan, 238.

<sup>116</sup>*Special Standing Committee on Reconstruction*, testimony of R.A. Hoey, Superintendent of Welfare and Training, IAB, 254.

and economic inequality based on racist views and practices. War-induced anxieties intensified suspicion of “foreigners” — a term that encompassed large numbers of Canadian-born and naturalized people of Japanese, central, eastern and southern European descent as well as Jews — as unpatriotic, disloyal, radical, and incapable of becoming truly Canadian. The war also reinforced racist assumptions that African Canadians, eastern and southern Europeans, and Native people were fit only for menial jobs; that Jewish, Chinese, and Japanese Canadians were economically aggressive; and that Jews in particular were given to shady practices. Such racist stereotypes in turn legitimized ongoing employment discrimination.

The state colluded in racist practices. Although by no means were all state officials or all Canadians racist, the pragmatism that informed official complicity with employment discrimination underscores the pervasiveness of racism in wartime Canada. State officials — some of whom held racist ideas — were willing to accept employers’ and workers’ racist preferences because they believed that to do otherwise would create social unrest and disrupt war industries. Moreover, officials found that the relegation of minority groups such as Chinese Canadians, Japanese Canadians, and Native people to menial work offered the important benefit of filling jobs that Canadians with wider options avoided.

Racist assumptions in wartime Canada clearly affected some groups more adversely than others. People of colour, or “visible minorities,” targets of the most extreme, state-sanctioned racism before World War II, continued to suffer most from employment discrimination during the war. Southern and eastern Europeans, however, were also racialized, and hence disadvantaged as workers and citizens. At the same time, state officials were most keenly aware of and most willing to tackle discrimination against these groups. Indeed, the varying extent to which racism shaped the experiences of racialized minority workers during the war serves as an important reminder of the complexity and historical specificity of the meaning of race. On the one hand, limits to the mobility of all these workers amidst wartime labour shortages reflect both the depth of racist views in mid-20th-century Canada and the practical advantages of racist assumptions in filling undesirable but essential jobs in the economy. On the other hand, the selective allocation of different groups within the labour market expressed their placement in a racial hierarchy that privileged those from northern and western Europe — especially “Anglo-Saxons” — while disadvantaging eastern and southern Europeans, people of African and Asian origin and Indigenous Canadians to differing degrees. Anti-discrimination campaigns by racialized minorities themselves — with the help of their English and French Canadian allies — were required to begin to dismantle this hierarchy after the war and thus to pave the way toward greater, if imperfect, equality for minority groups in Canadian society. As the status of workers of eastern and southern European descent improved, the chasm that separated them from people of African and Asian origin and Indigenous Canadians unfortunately deepened.

*The author thanks Ruth Frager, Tami Friedman, Wayne Thorpe, and the anonymous referees for their helpful suggestions, Larry Savage for research assistance, and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council for financial assistance.*

Genuine Canadian Magazines is a registered trademark of Magazines Canada.



CAPTIVATING.



CAPTIVATING.\*

\*CANADIAN MAGAZINES MAKE YOUR INTERESTS MORE INTERESTING. From Literature to Business, all written from a refreshingly Canadian viewpoint you won't find anywhere else. Just look for the Genuine Canadian Magazine icon at your favourite newsstand, or visit [magazinescanada.ca](http://magazinescanada.ca) to find what interests you.

