

Imprisoned on Reserves

Erased from the metaphoric map, like chalk dust from the supposed *tabula rasa* of the prairies, Aborigines were swept off the land in an ethnic-cleansing campaign that confined them to reserves. These were Canada's first POW concentration camps. Corraling Indians into captivity kept them out of the way of European settlers who were then being poured into the prairies.

As James Daschuk said in *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*: "Reserves became centres of incarceration as the infamous 'pass system' was imposed to control movements of the treaty population." And, as Sir John A. MacDonald told Parliament, we "are doing all that we can by refusing food until the Indians are on the

verge of starvation, to reduce the expense."³¹

More than a century later, the Canadian government finally admitted:

"The notorious pass system was never part of the formal Indian Act regime. It began as a result of informal discussions among government officials in the early 1880s in response to the threat that prairie Indians might forge a pan-Indian alliance against Canadian authorities. Designed to prevent Indians on the prairies from leaving their reserves, its immediate goal was to inhibit their mobility. Under the system, Indians were permitted to leave their reserves only if they had a written pass from the local Indian agent."³²

To the Mounties, the blatant illegality of enforcing mass internment was irrelevant. Under the Indian Act, Indians were not even allowed to hire lawyers to challenge

the Canadian government's crimes.

Besides using the "Pass System" to arrest Indians caught "off the reservation," Mounties also jailed them for trespassing and for vagrancy. This was appreciated by leading Methodist Social Gospellers like J.S. Woodsworth. In *Strangers Within Our Gates* (1909), he used a five-page quotation from L.M. Fortier, Chief Clerk of Canada's Immigration Department. Speaking of the Mounties, he said: "Colonizing the North-West would be a very different matter without the aid of this splendid organization." Using his racist wit to lump together crooks with all Indians found guilty of being "off reserve," Fortier said Canada's Mounties kept a "sharp lookout" for "smugglers, horse thieves, criminals, wandering Indians, and such like gentry."³³

The Occupation(al) Psychosis of Empire-Building Missionaries

By Richard Sanders

The Canadian mission to expand the British empire was a springboard for spreading "Christian values" around the world. Capturing the Canadian west was seen as a moral exercise to build the religious muscles of civilisation. Fixated on their Social-Gospel mission, progressives took up the "white man's burden" to uplift heathens and inferior races wherever they could be found.

"[I]f Prairie society were given Christian foundations, Canada could become a mighty base for exporting the Christian evangel on a global scale," said historian George Emery, so that "Canada could participate fully in the Anglo-Saxon mission to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth."¹ As its "Board of Missions" reported in 1908, "the mission of the Methodist Church is to save Canada, that through Canada we may do our part toward saving the world."²

By 1919, Canada's Protestant churches supported 768 overseas missionaries in ten countries, at a cost of about \$2 million (\$25.5 million in 2015). This, said historian Robert Wright, "rendered Canada the greatest missionary nation in Protestant Christendom on a per-capita basis."³ This global "missionary enterprise," he continued, "owed much ...to the generosity of wealthy Canadian businessmen in the Layman's Missionary Movement." Much of this largesse came from the pockets of "executives, brokers and lawyers" in Toronto's three richest churches.⁴ Besides their devotion to spreading "The Word," these businessmen were avid promoters

(and beneficiaries) of empire. Being enslaved by their blind faith in both religion and capitalism, Canadian businessmen and missionaries shared an inability to see beyond the shackles of their cultural programs.

In 1918, when economist/sociologist Thorstein Veblen⁵ coined the phrase "trained incapacity," he applied the term to capitalists, critiquing their "habitual addiction to pecuniary... considerations." Arguing that businessmen have a "trained inability to apprehend any other than the immediate pecuniary bearing of their manoeuvres," he said their "habitual employment... holds them more rigorously and consistently to...pecuniary valuation."⁶

Veblen's book also described how religion provides "national strength" to "predatory cultures," which were "essentially... parasitic..., despotic, and, with due training, highly superstitious..." Religion, Veblen maintained, "fosters the national pride of a people chosen by the Most High," and "trains the population in habits of subordination and loyalty."⁷

Veblen's idea of "trained incapacity" has been widely adapted. In 1931, philosopher/psychologist John Dewey applied it to ethnology and created the phrase "occupational psychosis." In 1935, literary theorist Kenneth Burke used Veblen and Dewey's work to explain many maladaptive beliefs and behaviours. In 1937, Belgian sociologist Daniel Warnotte applied it to his study of "professional deformation" in bureaucracies. US sociologist Robert Merton added to the idea in 1949 when studying dysfunctional "overconformity" and inflexibility in large institu-

tions. Recently, theology professor Birgit Herppich has tried to use the idea of "occupational psychosis" to reduce "cultural bias in missionary education."⁸ Using the "trained incapacity" theory to improve missionary success rates reveals a learned inability to see that "missionary education" is, *in itself*, a clear form of "cultural bias."

Missionaries are preoccupied with the task of educating nonbelievers. This is not a mere job, career or *occupation*. It is a self-righteous calling or mission that can seize, capture, take over or possess those who occupy this field of work. Trained in the business of conversion, missionaries may become so engrossed, fixated or occupied by their task that they are blinded to its harmful effects. For example, being incapable (or unwilling) to see that residential schools were the tools of cultural genocide, missionaries gave glowing tales to bless their efforts to educate heathens.

Such narratives were blindly taken as gospel by many who, though outside the missionary field, professed Christianity. Because political and economic elites, occupying many professions, adopted missionary beliefs, the vocation's trained incapacities spread widely and infected many huge institutions. The missionary mindset, having escaped its professional confines, was able to seize settler culture as a whole.

On a social level, missionary attitudes were central to Canada's colonial *occupation*, that political habit of seizing, occupying, controlling and profiting from lands already settled by others. Missionaries rendered progressive-sounding narratives to justify the containment of Indians, atheist socialists and other threats to

Although racism was the norm in Woodsworth's circles, it was opposed by radicals, not just with words but with actions. In 1906, when local 526 of the anarchist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was formed in Vancouver, it was led by Squamish First Nation activists. Though mostly Indigenous, this Lumber Handlers' union also had Chinese, Ha-



J.W. Bengough, *Grip*, April 1888.

“Christian Statesmanship”

Sir John: Indians starving? Oh, well.... I'll see you don't come to want...Mr. Contractor.”

[Note: Sign reads “Starved by a Christian Gov't”]

the status quo. This Christian evangel has now been replaced with the Good News that global salvation can be found by spreading “Canadian values.”

References/Notes

1. George Emery, *Methodism on the Canadian Prairies, 1896-1914*, 1970, pp.11-12. (PhD thesis, History, UBC.) circle.ubc.ca/bitstream/id/123796/UBC_1970_A1%20E44_4.pdf
2. Annual Report, Missionary Society, 1907-08, pp.55-56. Cited in *Ibid.*, p.12
3. Robert Wright, *A World Mission: Canadian Protestantism and the Quest for a New International Order, 1918-1939*, 1991, p.53.
4. Phyllis Airhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada*, 1992, p.188.
5. In 1899, Veblen wrote *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, coined the term “conspicuous consumption” and took on Stephen Leacock as a PhD student in the Political Economy at the University of Chicago.
6. Thorstein Veblen, *The Instinct of Workmanship*, 1918, pp.347-348.
7. *Ibid.*, pp.166-169.
8. Birgit Herppich, “Cultural Bias in Missionary Education: The Unintentional Dynamic of Trained Incapacity,” *Papers, Bk 32*, 2014. place.asburyseminary.edu/firstfruitspapers/32/

waiian, Anglo and Chilean members.³⁴

Capitalism and religion were under attack by atheist radicals like Jack London. In *The Iron Heel*, published one year before Woodsworth's xenophobic tract, London's hero was Ernest Everhard. In arguing with a well-meaning but naive Bishop, he said the “Indian is not so brutal and savage as the capitalist class” and noted “The Church condones the frightful brutality and savagery with which the capitalist class treats the working class.” London also quoted Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist leaders to prove the “Church's outspoken defense of chattel slavery.”³⁵

London was influenced by US Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs,³⁶ an atheist cofounder of the IWW. He compared the state's control of unions with their control of Indians. Capitalists, he said in 1906, tolerated organised labour “so long, only, as it keeps within ‘proper bounds,’ but ... put [it] down summarily the moment its members, like the remnants of Indian tribes on the western plains, venture beyond the limits of their reservations.”³⁷

By keeping Indians within their “proper bounds,” Canada's pass system contributed to genocide on every level: physical, economic, religious, social, psychological and political. Confinement to reserves cut off access to food and other resources, blocked trade and commerce, stopped travel to religious and social events, prevented the building of alliances, and stopped parents from visiting children kidnapped and held in government-financed, church-run residential schools.

Penned in by Education

Residential schools were seen as essential to progress. To Social-Gospel reformers on the cutting edge of Canada's western frontier, the “Three Cs” were the key to teaching Indians about the culture of their superiors. As UBC Political Science professor Barbara Arneil has said, the “driving force” behind this education was “to foster ‘civic virtue,’ to ‘morally uplift,’ and to build ‘civilization’ through the progressive vehicle of education and the *social gospel*.”³⁸ (Emphasis added.)

While the government and its religious agents sometimes differed on how to impose the “Three Cs,” they collaborated well. John MacLean, a Methodist missionary in Alberta, who became a public school inspector,³⁹ wrote in 1899 that the government wanted residential schools to “teach the Indians first to work and then to pray.” MacLean however said mission-

aries wanted to “christianize first and then civilize.”⁴⁰ Either way, the Three-C process was genocide. While First Nations were dispossessed of land and culture, Canada succeeded in expanding the boundaries of the British empire. To political, economic and religious elites, it was a win-win-win solution to the “Indian problem” that they saw as a major obstacle to “progress.”

Whatever their differences, church and state agreed on the value of residential schools in destroying the symbolic core of Aboriginal cultures, their languages. MacLean became the Methodist Church's chief archivist and chief librarian at the Social Gospel's Wesley College in Winnipeg (1922-1928). (See p.26.) He said that: “It is the desire of the Government and the missionaries that the English language should become the only medium of communication.”⁴¹ In *Canadian Savage Folk* (1896), MacLean further remarked that:

“There can be no legitimate method of stamping out the native language except by a wise policy of teaching English in the schools, and allowing the Indian tongue to die out.”⁴²

Canada's religious schools for Indians were a major weapon in the all-out war to exterminate Aboriginal cultures. During the 1880s, Canada engineered a “Perfect Storm” to wash the prairies clean of First Nations and to usher in a golden age for European settlers. As the government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission noted in 2012:

“From 1883 onward, the federal government began funding a growing number of industrial schools in the Canadian West. It also continued to provide regular funding to the church-run boarding schools. The residential system grew with the country. As Euro-Canadians settled the prairies, BC, and the North, increasing numbers of Aboriginal children were placed in residential schools.”⁴³

In 1884, after a report contracted by Sir John A. MacDonald, Canada began pouring money into the Churches' existing program of residential schools. The report, written by Nicholas F. Davin, a poet/playwright/lawyer and newspaperman-cum-Tory MP, urged the Canadian government to copy the assimilation plan of the US government's euphemistically-named “Peace Commission.” He said this US program, “known as... ‘Aggressive Civilization,’” had been “amply tested” since 1869. Its “principal feature,” he said, was the “industrial school.” The “chief thing to attend to in dealing with the less civilized or wholly barbarous tribes,” Davin said, “was to