House of Commons Debates

FIRST SESSION, FIFTH PARLIAMENT.

SPEECH OF MR. SHAKESPEARE, M. P.,

—ON—

CHINESE IMMIGRATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

OTTAWA, 29TH MARCH, 1883.

Mr. SHAKESPEARE moved that the House resolve itself into Committee to consider the following resolution:—

That in the opinion of this House it is expedient to enact a law similar in principle to the law now in force in Australia, and entitled the 'Influx of Chinese Restriction Act, 1881.'

He said: This subject which has been before the House on several occasions, and to many hon. members it is not new, and hence I think it will be useless for me to speak at any length, feeling, at the same time, confident that a question of this kind will be favorably received by members of this House. In rising to move this resolution, I do so with a feeling of great responsibility. I regret very much that the circumstances and conditions existing in British Columbia, render it necessary to enact a law making provision for the protection of our people against the encroachment of Chinese; but, Sir, the necessity for immediate legislation is both pressing and imperative. In my humble endeavor to place a few facts before the House, I ask the favorable indulgence of hon. members. The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, recognizing the evil consequences resulting from the continued immigration of Chinese, has repeatedly pressed on the Government of Canada to take some steps to mitigate the intolerable mischief which the Chinese have done, and are doing, to the people and Province of British Columbia. Public meetings have been held for this purpose, and the people there are as one man in their desire to prevent any more Chinese entering the Province. So united are they upon the question that no candidate, either for this House or the Local House, would have any chance of success if he expressed dissent from that desire. I have no doubt that some hon. members will ask, "Why are you British Columbians opposed to the Chinese coming into your midst?" I might be permitted to state that we are opposed to those people coming there, in the first place, because they come there as slaves, and are treated as such while there. The Chinese are brought there and sold in droves like sheep, and it is really amusing, and at the same time appalling to notice the manœuvres of the Chinese bosses when these immigrants arrive at our shores. When a ship reaches the port of Victoria, for instance, with 500, 600 or 800 Chinese on board, as was the case during last summer, and when they are landed on the wharf, they are led away in groups by the different Chinese firms to whom they are consigned, and are taken to the Chinese Department, in Chinatown, there, and the name of every man is enrolled on the books of those establishments. They are taken care of by the different Chinese firms, and afterwards are sold to the highest bidder. That is done in this way: white men, employers of labor, knowing that a large number of Chinese have arrived, proceed to those establishments to ascertain for what amount they can obtain 50, 100 or 150 Chinese. "How much will you give," asks John. The white man will offer so much. The Chinese firm say they can get so-and-so; and so the bargaining goes on, the man offering the highest price securing the men. To make the matter worse, Chinese women are brought there and sold for base purposes. And this is all done in British Columbia, under the British flag. Slavery of the most direful character is being carried on there to-day, surrounded by a Christian community and Christian institutions, and this slavery is demoralizing and contaminating the youth of our land. We are opposed to the Chinese because we find it impossible to compete with them. It has been found to be impracticable in all departments of labor and industry involving manual labor for a white man to compete with a Chinaman, especially in those light situations which have hitherto been filled by women and young people. Why, Sir, we have only to cast our eyes over to the State of California, and we know, from what we have heard—and possibly some of us know it from personal observation—that thousands of white men have had to leave that State, many of them with their families; and they were compelled to leave it because they found it impossible to compete with the Chinese. What did Mr. Sergeant say in a speech which he delivered before the Senate of the United States in 1878:

"A Chinaman will live on wages that will not support a white man and his family, being well provided himself on a handful of rice, and a little refuse pork, and dessicated fish, costing only a few cents a day. He becomes rich accordingly, to his own standard, on wages which would beggar a white man's family."

Now, Sir, that statement is perfectly correct. In British Columbia, to-day, a Chinaman can live like a prince on

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twenty-five cents a day; and a white man cannot live for less than one dollar a day. A Chinaman has only himself to support, but a white man has himself and his wife, and very often children. The grand object and move of the Chinaman is always to offer his services at a lower rate than white men are getting, in order to drive the latter from the field; but directly he succeeds in this, he immediately demands a higher rate of wages. We have had a little experience, Mr. Speaker, in British Columbia, with regard to competition between white men and the Chinese. I know of instances myself, where white men were engaged in certain callings, previons to such a large influx of Chinese, who were doing well, and making comfortable livings; but after so many Chinese arrived, and went into the same kind of businesses, these men found it impossible to produce the same article which the Chinamen were producing, for one-half of what they were willing to accept. The result was that these white men were obliged to abandon their callings, and leave the country. We have also had experience, Mr. Speaker, as to what these people will do when they are masters of the situation. Only a few years ago, a difficulty arose between the Chinese and their employers; and on the sound of the gong in Chinatown, every Chinaman who heard that sound, and who was at work, dropped his tools and ceased labor. Messengers were sent throughout the city to the hotels, private houses, and boot factories, to state that the Chinese were wanted in Chinatown; and every man employed in these places, as well as in the barber shops, restaurants, &c., had to go at a moment's notice, at the risk of his life, if he delayed doing so. The result, Mr. Speaker, was that our boot factories were closed, and those who employed these people in their private houses had to do the work themselves, for which I was not sorry. The hotels, &c., were treated in the same way; and the Chinese did not return to their situations until the matter was settled in their favor. This shows what these people will do, when they are masters of the situation; and to encourage any number of them, Mr. Speaker, to come into any community is simply to impoverish and demoralize it. Only a short time before I left for this city a ship left the port of Victoria for China with 500 Chinese on board; and I ascertained on the best authority that they carried away with them $500,000. This has been carried on to such an extent that we find that fully one-half of the total earnings made in the mines, and on the railway, and in private houses leaves the Province every year in the possession of Chinamen, there to remain for ever. Now, Sir, it would not matter so much if the places of those who departed were not supplied by other Chinamen; but this is not the case, and these 500 Chinamen will live in China like princes all the days of their lives, on the amount of money which they have thus saved, while their places are filled by 500, 600 or 700 more slaves from China. They are coming and going all the time, drawing the life-blood out of the Province, and depriving our people of their just rights; and I say it is no wonder that our people there have raised their voices against this invasion, and very justly so too, because they have too good grounds for so doing with regard to this evil. Now, Sir, apply this principle and condition of things to the Province of Ontario, and the other Provinces, and I venture to assert that a remedy for it would be demanded and found in less than forty-eight hours. I fear, Sir, that unless some restrictions are placed upon the continued influx of Chinese into that Province, the day is not far distant when they will monopolize the entire industrial field. We have already in British Columbia, some 13,000 or 14,000 Chinese. It is useless to disguise the fact, that unless some measure is adopted immediately to prevent it, they will soon outnumber us; and I am sure, that every hon. gentleman in this House will admit, that such a state of affairs is not at all desirable. But, Sir, this evil will not end in British Columbia. The other Provinces will very soon smart under the demoralizing effects of slave labor. When the Canadian Pacific Railway is pushed through to British Columbia, what will be the result? Why, these Chinese will find their way into Ontario and the other Provinces of the Dominion, and what will be the practical result of their presence in these Provinces? Why, Sir, the white girls and boys, and the white men, who are employed in our factories to-day, will be supplanted by Chinese. I was in the little town of Gananoque a short time ago, and I was delighted to find the numerous factories there in full blast; and it struck me very forcibly what a grand thing it was that all those factories should be carried on by white labor, and what a curse it would be to that little town if the Chinese were permitted to take the place of those operators. In Montreal, which I visited the other day, I was pleased to notice the number of large manufacturing establishments there giving employment to from 400 to 1,600 hands. Just imagine what a terrible curse it would be, and what poverty would result, in that city, if these operatives were supplanted by Chinese labor.

It being six o'clock, the Speaker left the Chair.

After Recess.

Mr. SHAKESPEARE. When the House rose, I was referring to the effects which would follow if the Chinese were allowed to come into the various Provinces of the Dominion, and take the place of those who are employed in our factories. But not only would they replace those people, but the persons who have helped to build up this country—those who came into the Dominion when it was a wilderness, and went into the bush and cut down trees, cleared the forest, and levelled the hills, and made the wilderness blossom as the rose—would have to follow the example of the factory operators. I repeat, that it is impossible for white people to compete with the Chinese. There was a time when this question was one in which only the laboring man was interested, but it is beginning to take a different shape entirely. In British Columbia, the manufacturers, as well as the laboring classes, are beginning to feel the evil effects of the influx of the Chinese, as the latter can manufacture their own goods more cheaply than the white manufacturers. Many persons of that class, who, a short time ago, were in favor of admitting the Chinese into British Columbia, now express themselves decidedly opposed to their admission for the simple reason that they find that the Chinese are able to produce many articles at a much cheaper rate than the white manufacturers. As soon as the Pacific Railway is finished through to British Columbia, not only will the Chinese come here themselves, but they will be in a position to bring their manufactured goods into Ontario and the other Provinces of the Dominion, because they can manufacture them at a cheaper rate than the local manufacturers. We are told that it is economical to employ the Chinese in preference to white men; but I am not one of those who believe that doctrine. I believe that one white man is as good as half-a-dozen Chinese any time. I am sure that to-day the contractor for the Pacific Railway in British Columbia would not employ the Chinese to the extent he does if he had white men there to do his work. I know we find men in certain positions in society, men who do not come into contact with Chinese influence, or Chinese labor, who repeatedly speak in favor of employing them. But as a rule they are not practical men. They are men who, in many instances, occupy public positions, and draw large salaries without doing much for them. Now, Sir, I wish to read a short extract, in reference to this matter, from an interview which a newspaper reporter had with a gentleman who has built more rail-

roads than any other man in the same length of time. His name is Mr. Clark. He says:

"It is stated, sir, that you are about to undertake the final completion of the line (the Northern Pacific) between the Eastern and Western ends.

"I may or may not. It is a question of time and labor. I can engage to complete the road before the close of July next, but I must introduce white in the place of Chinese labor.

"Then you will not use Chinese labor on the eastern end of the Northern Pacific?

"No; we have not, and if we had, I am of opinion that there would have been at least another year's delay in the completion of a through line between Portland and Chicago. I have no faith in Chinese labor. * * I have no hesitation in saying that Chinese day labor is a failure."

After referring to a number of roads which he has built, he goes on:

"I have no hesitation in making the assertion that the work has been done much cheaper, much better, more quickly, and more substantially, than it could have been done with Chinese labor."

That is the opinion of a practical man, who has employed both white labor and Chinese labor, and I prefer taking the testimony of such a man to that of men who have had no experience whatever in the business. From a sanitary point of view, the Chinese are a great drawback to the community in which they live, especially where they are found in large numbers as they are in the city of Victoria. I know it will be said that we ought to pass sanitary measures compelling them to live properly. Well, I can say that we have done so; but people who have had no dealings with the Chinese can form no conception of the trouble and expense which they cause to corporations that try to make them comply with the regulations. If they are prosecuted, sometimes lawyers will take up their cases—and they are excellent clients for the lawyers. They pay good fees; they have plenty of money, and they do not mind the money so long as they win the case. We have a by-law in Victoria to regulate the sanitary condition of these people, and extra men have been employed in order to try and compel them to live as they ought to live. It is also found to be very difficult to get any taxes from them. I have no hesitation in saying that out of the 13,000 or 14,000 Chinese we have in British Columbia, not more than 9,000 pay their share of taxes. Not only do they not pay their taxes, but we have frequently to employ extra men in order to secure what we do get from them. During the construction of the Pacific Railroad in British Columbia, a year ago, the Superintendent of Police and three or four deputies were ordered to go up the railroad for the purpose of assisting to collect the revenue taxes from the Chinese who were working on the road. Now, it is certainly very unfair that the Government should be obliged to go to so much more trouble and expense to get their taxes from that class of people than from any other portion of the population. I have no doubt hon. gentlemen will wonder at this; but persons who have not resided among these people, and seen their tactics and their wily ways, cannot possibly understand this question thoroughly. As an evidence of the unanimity of feeling that prevails in British Columbia upon this subject, I may mention that a few days ago a resolution was unanimously passed in the Local Legislature, which is now assembled, urging the Dominion Government to take some steps towards restricting the immigration of Chinese to that Province. Some years ago, during the Walkem Administration, an Order was passed that no Chinese should be employed in any way by the Local Governments, and from that day to the present I do not believe that a solitary Chinaman has drawn one dollar from that Government. In the Municipal Council of the city of Victoria, seven years ago, I think, I introduced a resolution that no Chinese should be employed in corporation works. That resolution was carried, and not one dollar has been paid by the corporation of Victoria to a Chinaman from that day to the present. So that we have done probably all that we can do towards remedying this evil. But there is a step further we want to go, and which it is impossible for the Local Government, but is in the power of this House to take—that is, to place some restriction on the continued immigration of Chinese to our Province. The State of California, as you are aware, has passed a Bill prohibiting Chinese from going in there during the next ten years. We all know the difficulties and heartburnings that the people of that State have had to contend with, owing to the large influx of Chinese, before they finally succeeded in passing the Bill. And now, what is the result? Why, Sir, that British Columbia is to-day the dumping place of the Pacific coast—the place where the Chinese are dumped. Hence the great necessity for taking some step in the direction proposed in this Bill. It will be argued, I know, that it will be time enough to place some restriction on the Chinese when the road will be finished; but that would be like shutting the stable door after the horse is gone. That would be working backwards. I maintain there is no necessity to wait for the completion of the road. There are men coming to-day into that Province, and more will come in, if an effort is not made to prevent a further influx of Chinese. There need not be any hesitation on that point. The Bill I propose to introduce does not propose to interfere with those Chinese who are in the country to-day. We are willing they should remain there; but I think every hon. member will admit that 14,000 Chinese in a Province so limited in population as ours, is quite sufficient for some time to come. The idea that the Chinese are going to leave and will become fewer in number, is a fallacy, because there are large numbers in China only waiting for an opportunity to come over into Canada. Hence these people will not leave, and any that may leave will be replaced. During last summer, close upon 8,000 came into the port of Victoria. Is it not, then, high time some restriction should be placed on their coming. Supposing, what is very likely, that 8,000 more should come in during the coming summer, what are we to do with them? The question is a serious one, one that affects the vital interests of the whole Dominion. This is not a question which I bring before the House just for the sake of doing so, but one in which I feel interested myself; and I think that every man, especially one who has a family growing up, must feel a deep interest in this question as to what is to become of the young people that are growing up in the country. In Australia, three colonies passed measures restricting the immigration of Chinese, and those laws are still in force. Hence I think we cannot be far wrong in passing a measure similar to that passed in New South Wales, Australia. I will just refer to one or two provisions of that measure for the purpose of showing its nature and extent. One provides that on the arrival of any ship at any port in this colony, the master shall deliver to the collector the names of the passengers, and of the places whence they come. The Bill also provides that no vessel shall bring a greater number of Chinese than in the proportion of one to 100 tons of tonnage. Should the captain fail to report, he is subject to a fine of £10; and a penalty is also attached should he bring a greater number of Chinese than allowed by law. There is also a provision that:

"Notwithstanding anything in this Act contained, any Chinese arriving in the colony who produces evidence to the Collector of Customs, or other duly authorized officer, that he is a British subject, shall be wholly exempt from the operation of this Act, and a certificate of the Governor of any British Colony, or of a British Consul, shall be sufficient evidence of the claim of such Chinese to exemption under this section."

Thus this does not interfere with British subjects. This law also provides:

"The provisions of this Act shall not be applicable to any Chinese duly accredited to this colony by the Government of China, or by or

under the authority of the Imperial Government on any special mission."

It further provides:

"The penalties and restrictions imposed by this Act shall not, nor shall any of them, be held to be applicable in respect of any Chinese being one of the crew of any vessel arriving in any port in New South Wales, and who shall not be discharged therefrom, or land, except in the performance of his duties in connection with such vessel."

I maintain that we have a duty to perform in this matter, and which we owe to our country and our families, that is to place some restriction to these people coming in. After the assurance of the hon. First Minister a few days ago, I feel that this question will be favorably received by this House, and I am sure by the country at large. Not only in British Columbia, but in Ontario and Quebec, I find that the people are in favor of a restrictive measure; and hence I feel such a measure would be in the interest of the whole of this vast Dominion of which we are so proud. I think we should take a step this night towards wiping out this incubus upon our Province, and thus keep within our borders a class of people who are calculated to sympathize with us in our trial through life, who will help to build up our country, who will contribute to our public institutions and to our churches; whilst the Asiatics never contribute a solitary dollar to those purposes—with a few exceptions. How are we to prosper, how are we to succeed, if these people are to come in and take our places? For these reasons I would ask this honorable House to adopt this resolution and vote in favor of restrictive measures upon these people.

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