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January 13, 1942

Dear Mr. Edwards,

I am referring to your letter of January 9th in which you enquire what the government policy is with relation to Japanese in Canada whose ordinary means of livelihood has been interfered with by the war. You do not tell me whether the people whom you describe as Japanese are Canadian citizens or Japanese nationals. It has never been the policy of the Government of Canada that Canadian citizens should be dismissed from their employment merely because the country of their racial origin is at war with Canada. The government policy both in respect to these men and in respect to aliens was emphatically stated in a circular letter of March 14th sent out by the Minister of Labour. I am quoting three paragraphs:

"Complaints have been made that persons of foreign name or birth but of unquestioned loyalty have had difficulty in securing or maintaining employment. It is, therefore, desirable that in exercising all proper vigilance that unjust discrimination should be avoided against those who while not born in this country have been accepted as citizens or residents and as such have the right to earn their living.

Certainly no prejudice should exist against those of foreign origin who have shown their willingness to serve the country in the armed forces.

For the final outcome of the war to be successful against our common enemy, we require the help of the various nationalities represented in our population regardless of creed or racial origin; we cannot hope to build up a truly national spirit if we have not the support of those who have given Canada the allegiance

Commander C.P. Edwards,  
Deputy Minister of Transport,  
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they formerly owed to the country of their birth. Once satisfied that this allegiance is fully given to Canada, these new citizens ought to be able to exercise their rights of citizenship in this country, always of course preserving the qualification of good conduct and unquestioned loyalty which rests on all citizens."

No different policy has been adopted with respect to Canadians of Japanese race except that they are being required to withdraw from fishing on the West Coast. You will appreciate that it is extremely difficult for the government to adopt a policy designed to meet cases of hardship arising from the disregard of the circular letter of the Minister of Labour and in practice it is probable that there would be more popular objection to providing guaranteed employment for men of Japanese race than there would be to maintaining them in their existing employments, particularly when these have continued for years. It is suggested that the Canadian National Railways might see their way to reinstating their "seven Japanese employees" citing for their reason for doing so the circular letter which I have quoted.

Yours sincerely,

H.L. Keenleyside

Assistant Under Secretary of State  
for External Affairs.