

## The Japanese Canadian Properties

On December 3, a commission appointed by the dominion government will begin hearings in Vancouver, to investigate property losses incurred by Japanese Canadians who were evacuated from that province in 1942. There are some regrettable limitations imposed on the commission. One is found in its terms of reference. The commission is not authorized to consider all losses arising from the evacuation, as is being done in the United States, but can investigate only the claims of losses incurred from the sale, theft or destruction of properties while they were under the control of the public custodian.

Another limitation is the short notice for filing claims. On October 2nd, an advertisement appeared in the press listing what should be done to file claims, and warning the would-be claimants that documents must be filed in Vancouver before November 30th.

Most of the people who lost their homes, business properties and personal belongings owing to their enforced and sudden departure from British Columbia in 1942 are now scattered over the prairie and central provinces. Some are in rural and mining areas, and witness access to lawyers whom they need to prepare the required documents. One family, for example, is 200 miles north of Fort William and unable quickly to get to a lawyer. Some cannot read English, many have become impoverished, and some are confused and emotionally shattered by the loss of homes and livelihoods.

Each claimant has to declare, on oath, the amount of losses he sustained because his property was sold "below fair market value" at the time of the sale; and he has to list the "fair market value" of personal properties that were destroyed or stolen, at the time

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they were stolen or destroyed, while under the control of the custodian. To establish such claims in fairness to themselves, the claimants would need to engage expert property appraisers. The short notice has given them almost no chance to obtain such expert assistance. Certainly people in the hinterland have no chance to get such aid within the time limit. Considering the distances that have to be travelled between the location of the properties and their owners, the appraisers would now have little time to do a satisfactory job. The short notice places the commission under a handicap in that the claims as filed may not have information on which to base a just decision.

In the U.S., more generous treatment is apparently being given to Japanese Americans who were evacuated from the Pacific coast area. A bill is before the House of Representatives to provide compensation to Japanese Americans for all losses arising out of their evacuation. Moreover, the U.S. department of the interior has acknowledged that the wholesale removal of Japanese Americans from the west coast was a "triumph for the racists." The report in part stated that not military necessity but "the voice of the racists was dominating public sentiment toward the Japanese Americans" after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The U.S. federal government endeavored constantly to lessen the hardships caused by evacuation. And now the plan in the U.S. is to provide compensation for all losses that had been caused by evacuation.

The treatment of Japanese Canadians should not become "a triumph for the racists."