

Interned Japanese owe thanks, ex-envoy says

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT says it is sorry but will not compensate Japanese-Canadians for their internment during the Second World War.

Vancouver businessman Frank Bernard feels not even an apology is necessary.

He thinks Japanese-Canadians should thank Canada for the humane treatment they received.

Bernard represents the other side at the heart of the lingering Japanese-Canadian story, the side that does not bleed.

Last week, after studying a report from an all-party committee, the federal government concluded that injustice had been done to the relocated Japanese-Canadians, expressed regret over "the deprivation and hardship suffered by most members of the Japanese-Canadian community," but declined to express that regret in the form of reparation payments.

Bernard hopes this will end what he calls "the Liberal government's self-flagellation" over an issue he feels is little understood by most Canadians.

Bernard was there. He was right in the middle of it.

A Canadian citizen, Bernard was the Vancouver-based honorary vice-consul of Spain at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack.

When Canada declared war on Japan, Spain was approved by both countries as the third-party protecting power, the neutral intermediary, serving under the rules of the Geneva Convention

and reporting through the International Red Cross.

By that agreement, all of the 30,000 Japanese in Canada, 22,000 in B.C., came under Frank Bernard's consular jurisdiction. Until the end of the war, he had unlimited access and insight into the system set up by the Canadian government under Prime Minister Mackenzie King to relocate the Japanese-Canadians.

He had unlimited access to their new communities. His duties were to monitor and report on the living conditions of the relocation camps in Tashme, Slocan, Bridge River, Kaslo and New Denver and to serve as an intermediary for their complaints.

Bernard says: "The impression has been given that the Canadian authorities in charge of security after Pearl Harbor were monsters without a drop of the honey of human kindness. In fact, just the opposite is the truth. Never in the history of warfare have members of an enemy race been treated so humanely.

"In a time of near panic and wartime circumstances, the RCMP did a remarkable job of rounding up every Japanese on the coast.

"Remember, this happened when many Canadians were worked up in a frenzy of fear that most assuredly would have led to lynching and brutalization, had the Japanese not been protected.

"Many of today's loudest critics were the same ones who, in 1942,



Denny Boyd

cried for vengeance and harsh treatment when there was fear of Japanese landing on our coast, continued reports of victories by Japanese invasion armies and horrendous reports of brutal treatment of Allied prisoners of war by the Japanese."

After the relocation, Bernard was the arbitrator. He visited every camp once a month, spending a day or two in each, often accompanied by an RCMP official or a representative of the International Red Cross.

He knew some of the people in the camps, a few had been his classmates at King George High, but his relationship with them was impersonal.

Bernard says of the Japanese-Canadians: "I believe 95 per cent of them were loyal to Canada under normal circumstances, but who knows how many of them might have turned had the Japanese invaded the west coast, as was the real fear at that time. The other five per cent were enemies of this country.

"In each camp, there were trai-



FRANK BERNARD
... 1942 photograph

tors to Canada, more among the foreign-born Japanese. But it was impossible to tell who was loyal and who was disloyal. The fate of Canada could have been affected by one traitor, especially in the event of an invasion. There was no other alternative to ensure securi-

ty of Canada's coast waters. Under similar conditions today, the decision undoubtedly would have to be the same."

Bernard defends the system of internment as fiercely as he does the necessity.

"During the war, the standard of living of more than 80 per cent of the evacuees was actually raised. The B.C. Security Commission provided better education, better medical attention and better diet than the majority of the Japanese had enjoyed before the war," he says.

"The camps were warm, dry and comfortable. Capable people were placed in charge of each camp and the International Red Cross inspected the camps regularly. Excellent medical and education facilities were set up for each camp. For the 80 per cent I mentioned, the facilities were significantly better than they had when most of them lived in sub-standard areas in Vancouver, Steveston and Prince Rupert.

"Bear in mind, too, that this took place in wartime, while Canadian internees were dying from beri beri, slave labor and brutality."

Bernard recalls that when the Japanese internees complained to him about the removal of soya sauce from their diets, the Canadian government constructed a soya processing plant at Tashme. He also settled a brief strike, explaining to Japanese-Canadians working on the Hope-Princeton

Highway project that wartime strikes were inappropriate, especially by internees.

Bernard faces the seizure and sale of Japanese-Canadians' homes, fishing boats and personal possessions without apology.

"I was permitted to intercede in property matters on behalf of the Japanese. To imply intentional injustice in regard to Japanese properties is a gross untruth," he says.

"Real estate during that period had practically no market and land prices were ridiculously low. A five-room house could be bought for \$3,500 or rented for \$45 a month. New cars cost \$1,000. The minimum wage was \$65 a month.

"Bearing in mind the existing markets and the fact that hundreds and hundreds of properties, businesses, automobiles and boats had to be liquidated in a short time, I think the custodian, Glen McPherson, did a remarkable job in an orderly and honest fashion with good accountability. Admittedly, this brought material hardship to many of the Japanese, but keeping everything in fair perspective and considering the alternatives, such as those practised by the enemy, the Japanese were very fortunate.

"The Japanese problem was a serious one, but it was handled with good sense, compassion and efficiency. I take my hat off to the people, most of them dead now, who were part of this humanitarian project."