

Komagata Maru Perimeter Trail and Dock Naming - Text

The S.S. Komagata Maru arrived in Burrard Inlet from Hong Kong on May 23, 1914 carrying 376 passengers. The passengers were challenging Canada's racist Continuous Journey regulation, which only allowed legal entry to those migrants who arrived directly from their country of origin. Because there was no direct route from British India at that time, this was a deliberate action by the government to deny entry into the Dominion of Canada.

Actions by New Westminster City Council and Residents

The City of New Westminster supported Canada's racist policies which bolstered federal confidence in enforcing these unjust laws. On June 22 while the ship was moored in Burrard Inlet, New Westminster City Council passed a motion urging the Premier and the Minister of the Interior to "use every effort" in denying the passengers the ability to land. A week later, Mayor A.W. Gray presided over a mass meeting at St. Patrick's Hall endorsing a resolution supporting the actions of immigration officials and the "total exclusion of Asiatics from the country".

In contrast, New Westminster resident Mitt Singh Pindori was a member of the Komagata Maru Shore Committee. This Committee took over the charter of the ship and one of its many responsibilities was raising funds for the legal defense of the passengers.

The New Westminster City Council's actions supported a national movement against South Asians directly contributing to the plight of the passengers and an overall feeling of insecurity for South Asian residents of New Westminster. These actions are not in alignment with the values of the current City Council, nor do they reflect Canadian values of equity and justice.

The Aftermath

After 2 months of constant surveillance, legal challenges, physical struggles - and with the passengers running desperately short of food and water due to the government's inadequate provisions - the stalemate ended on July 23. The SS Rainbow, Canada's warship, sailed the Komagata Maru out of Canadian waters as the ship set off back to British India. On their arrival the passengers were greeted by hostility and violence by British Indian forces.

Arrival

The desire to come ashore was never possible for a majority of Komagata Maru passengers. The naming of this dock and the perimeter trail represents a symbolic arrival of their presence through memory and stories. Our country has undoubtedly suffered because these passengers – and all migrants unjustly turned away from its borders – were never able to contribute to Canadian society.

The City of New Westminster thanks Rajwant Toor and Jaswinder Toor from the Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society for drawing City Council's attention to this historical wrong.

Recommended Images:

1. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/397?display=full>
2. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/15897>

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