

The period before 1850 also marked the beginning of an immigration service. In 1827 the Colonial Office appointed a Chief Agent at Quebec. A description of his duties and activities gives the substance of certain activities and services rendered directly and indirectly today by officers of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. The agent was "to receive emigrants on landing, give out landing money, if any, clothe and feed the starving, hear complaints and bring proceedings against defaulting shipmasters, keep in touch with those needing employment, help the newcomers to find their friends and tranship them to their destination, and have all carefully recorded. He exceeded his official duties by compiling valuable information regarding available locations, state of roads, distances and expenses. He invited land owners to register their saleable property with him. His office became an indispensable clearing house for distressed and anxious strangers, and saved them from being exposed to the gross misrepresentations of land jobbers . . ."* The agent also instituted information bureaux along the routes to the West to advise intending colonists and to afford shelter to the sick while travelling. Pamphlets on settlement were also published.

Until 1869 the head tax authorized in 1831 and the provisions for quarantine remained the main protective measures. The amount of the tax varied frequently but the principle was retained and appears in the Immigration Act of 1869.

At Confederation in 1867 the Federal Government assumed responsibility for the inspection and quarantine establishments of the provinces, for immigration agents and other measures developed up to that time.

THE PROTECTION OF IMMIGRANTS

While the amelioration of transport conditions was necessarily a matter for the great shipping nations, Canadian immigration legislation has always embodied provisions against some major abuses, which British and American legislation also aimed to control. As early as 1802-3 a British Parliamentary Committee sat to inquire into the transport trade and showed the need for immediate legislation. The Passenger Vessels Act of 1803 (43 Geo. III, c. 56) initiated a struggle with the ship owners and diverse other interests which was to last more than half a century and left conditions little better than they had been in the beginning. The abuses which successive inquiries revealed and successive Acts attempted to control became once more the concern of a Royal Commission in 1851. It was found that, along with the deadly overcrowding of ships, the emigrant had become a general object of exploitation. At the point of embarkation he was set upon by 'crimps', a sort of specialist in defrauding emigrants and familiar with every device for extorting money. Tickets were sold for non-existent ships or such as had sailed already. Emigrants were sold useless gear or passage tickets at exorbitant prices. Crimps offered also to change their money, 'dollaring' their victims, or enticed them to confederate boarding houses where more of their funds would be taken from them and where they were sometimes directly robbed. At sea exploitation continued. Rations were doctored or were insufficient in quantity, money was extorted for necessities, uncooked food supplied to exact money for use of cooking fires; in addition, bullying and physical maltreatment were not uncommon. Few dared to complain and the law was slow. Often ships dumped their passengers at wrong ports, hundreds of miles from their destination or on deserted beaches. On landing, the 'new world' version of crimps, porters and runners would begin the process of exploitation all over again.

While transport to Canada had not been given any special study since *Lord Durham's Report*, sufficient was known of specific abuses to make provisions for the protection of immigrants at Canadian ports. Although shipping conditions were improving as steamships superseded sailing vessels by providing a third class or steerage type of accommodation, there was a constant incentive to utilize the maximum of ship space at the expense of passenger welfare. The Immigration Act of 1869 established the number of passengers

* Norman Macdonald, *ibid*, p. 21.