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May 24, 1989

Dear Friend:

The Komagata Maru incident is a dark day in Canadian history.

On May 23, 1914 - 75 years ago - approximately 375 residents of India arrived in Vancouver seeking an opportunity to establish themselves in Canada. As British subjects they argued that they were entitled to seek residence in this country. Instead of being met with open arms, they were met with bigotry, racism, slurs, police action and criticism from governments, both in the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia, and the federal government. Today, most Canadians are ashamed of what transpired 75 years ago.

This week in the Legislature I asked the provincial government to recognize the injustice directed towards the passengers of the Komagata Maru. I asked the Province to establish a commemorative in Vancouver recognizing the Komagata Maru incident as a reminder to all British Columbians and Canadians that such an event will never be repeated again in Canada.

I was astonished by the reply that I received from the Social Credit Minister of Tourism. The Minister indicated that the government has no plans whatsoever to provide a mark of recognition or a commemorative with respect to the Komagata Maru incident. The abruptness of his response and the attitude exemplified by that response were extremely insensitive given the desire of most Canadians to maintain harmonious race relations. I am enclosing for your reference, a copy of the question period exchange between myself and the Social Credit Minister of Tourism, and a copy of my subsequent press release.

I am writing to ask you to correspond immediately with the Minister of Tourism and ask him to reconsider his decision not to recognize the Komagata Maru incident. A letter from your organization, critical of the government's response, will go a long way towards serving to reverse this decision.

As an Indo-Canadian Member of the Legislature, I can tell you that I am proud of the contributions made by our community to Canada. We have established ourselves in all walks of life in this country and have served to make this a better place to live for ourselves, our children and the general population of this province. I want to assure you that I will continue to press the Minister of Tourism on this matter and with your support I am sure that we will be successful in getting the government to see the error of its ways.

Yours truly,

Moe Sihota, MLA
Esquimalt-Port Renfrew

enclosure



PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

3rd Session, 34th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF
DEBATES OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

(Excerpt)

KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT

MR. SIHOTA: I have a quick question to the Minister of Tourism. Today marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the *Komagata Maru* incident, which, of course, is a matter of note to the Indo-Canadian community in British Columbia. The *Komagata Maru* was here from May 23 to July 24. What steps is his ministry taking to come up with some type of commemorative recognition to mark the visit of the *Komagata Maru* and that incident in Canadian history? Will there be some kind of commemorative here in B.C. or in Vancouver?

HON. MR. REID: The simple answer is nothing.

Tuesday, May 23, 1989

Afternoon Sitting

Volume 13 Number 10

New Democrats

NEWS RELEASE



For Immediate Release
May 23, 1989

Subject: SOCREDS COMPOUND KOMAGATA MARU INJUSTICE - SIHOTA

Victoria - New Democrat MLA Moe Sihota says he's shocked that the Socred government has rejected out-of-hand any plans to acknowledge the disgraceful treatment of the Komagata Maru.

"It's nothing less than shocking that the Socred government is nonchalantly dismissing any plans to recognize the arrival of the Komagata Maru," said Sihota (Esquimalt - Port Renfrew).

The Komagata Maru, with 376 East Indians on board, arrived in Vancouver 75 years ago, but was turned away after it reached port. Sihota says there should be a mark of recognition in Vancouver to acknowledge what he calls "the saddest day in the history of the Indo-Canadian community." But when he asked Tourism Minister Bill Reid in the legislature about any plans to recognize the incident, the minister responded by saying "the simple answer is nothing."

"Seventy-five years later, the Socred government is compounding the injustice and bigotry that was carried out by the Canadian government against the passengers of the Komagata Maru," Sihota said.

"The Indo-Canadian community is simply seeking an acknowledgement of that injustice - a commemorative that will act as a reminder that this kind of racism must never happen again. Instead, the Socreds have insulted this community by uncategorically rejecting any kind of acknowledgement.

"This event has become a rallying point for the Indo-Canadian community and for the right to settle, live, and earn a living in Canada. The government must recognize the importance of this in Canadian and B.C. history, and reverse its decision."

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