

COMMUNITY

Men from Punjab faced hostility

Canadians have come a long way in their attitudes regarding racial tolerance and prejudice. Eighty years ago when the first few brave men from the Punjab sailed to Canada full of hope, they dreamed of earning enough money to take back to their families to enable them to live a more comfortable life. They had heard of the plentiful timber in B.C. and most found jobs in sawmills.

For many years these hard working immigrants fought against racial intolerance and bigotry. Last week Canada marked the 40th anniversary of the date minority groups in Canada were declared citizens and given the right to vote. They were also granted permission to bring their wives and children to start life anew in Canada.

April 12-18 was declared citizen-



Indo Canadian

By Joan Mayo

ship week in Canada and the local municipal councils of Cowichan and Chemainus organized ceremonies to observe the occasion.

Government plays a large part in

changing peoples attitudes as do teachers and school boards. We have been fortunate in B.C. that our government leaders and school officials have made great efforts to understand the customs of new immigrants and to teach understanding and tolerance in the schools.

A few months ago, on CBC TV, a film was showing explaining some of the customs and traditions of the Sikh people in B.C. I recently found myself part of a discussion about that film.

Near the end of the documentary it showed a private school for Sikh children now operating in Vancouver. Several of the children claimed to have been teased and made fun of in the public schools. Most said they were there because their parents wished it.

But is a separate school a sensi-

ble answer to this type of misunderstanding? This is what sparked the discussion.

Perhaps the school is to be run like our Canadian Christian Schools where the children take the same subjects as the public school classes but with more emphasis on Christian values, respect and good Canadian citizenship.

Perhaps the difference is that the classes are taught in the Punjabi language to ensure the continuation of the language and customs much like our French Immersion schools.

However, some in the discussion group expressed the fear that the pride in their parents' language customs and history might go beyond these values and enter into Sikh politics in India and thereby produce hundreds of young people full of hatred of the Hindu majority in India and determined to return

to the Punjab to fight for an independent religious Sikh state.

The discussion began during a T.V. news broadcast showing some of Vancouver's Sikh wearing the orange turban, a symbol of their hatred of the Government of India, marching through the streets of Vancouver in celebration of their Basakhi Festival. The parade included many school aged children.

No solution came about as a result of the discussion. All agreed it is much too complicated an issue and surely not for any of us to decide upon. But all agreed the Government of B.C. and Canada are to be praised for their efforts in encouraging minority groups to take their Canadian citizenship seriously and to take a more active part in Canadian, federal and municipal affairs.