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# **‘Peculiar Peoples’: The Hutterites’ Migration to Canada and the Selection of Desirable Citizens**

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**DEREK HATTEMER, FRITZ KUSCH, SELENA MCQUARRIE, AND  
LOUISE THATCHER**

The younger scholarship on migration history has identified and analyzed the introduction of individual examination of would-be migrants based on certain legally determined criteria as an important factor in the development of modern nation states’ migration policies. This paper analyzes the underlying cleavages inherent in the establishment of that system by presenting a peculiar example of group migration in a time in which the basic legal apparatus of individual migrant examination and admission was still in the making. Between 1917 and 1919, the eventual entry into Canada of large groups of Hutterites, a highly industrious, uncompromisingly pacifist anabaptist group of German descent whose lives centered around communal living and pious deeds, challenged the Canadian government’s developing migration regime. The Canadian parliamentary debates, which the paper analyzes, upheld the idea of individual assessment whilst awkwardly trying to bend the criteria in order to exclude the Hutterites as a group. The paper connects thus this case of group migration to the recent literature concerned with the development of individual migrant assessment. This paper deduces that the MPs were unanimously certain that migrants should be assessed individually and that the state had the right to reject certain individuals deemed unfit for entry into the country. Also, however, ambiguities concerning the state’s conception of individuals’ identities and group memberships on the one and of desirable migrants and citizens on the other hand are addressed.

## *Introduction*

Between 1917 and 1919, almost all of the Hutterites in the USA—around 2000 people—packed up their farms and crossed the border to resettle in Canada. An Anabaptist sect, the Hutterites lived in rural colonies with all property held in common. They had a long history of relocating across borders as a community to escape persecution and this move, triggered by the harassment they had faced during the war for being German-speaking pacifists, can be seen as part of this pattern. However, this journey had new features for the Hutterites: for the first time, they had to negotiate as migrants with a modern state bureaucracy applying new norms of selective immigration. While they were eventually able to settle in Canada, their move sparked nativist opposition and parliamentary debate which led to immigration laws passed specifically to exclude them. These debates pro-

vide a window onto the broader processes of this time, in which states codified ideals of ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ migrants and asserted their right to choose which individuals could enter the country. By examining these debates, we bring the Hutterites’ journey into a larger history of migration.

This article has three sections. We briefly tell the history of the Hutterites as a group, then we outline contemporary scholarship on the development of migration controls from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. In the final section, we bring these together by analyzing what Canadian parliamentarians had to say about the Hutterites as migrants, and what that can show us about the contested development of migration admission criteria.

Historians of the Hutterites have tended to come from Mennonite backgrounds themselves and their histories have reflected the Hutterites’ self-understanding as a persecuted minority forced to move in search of religious freedom.<sup>1</sup> We tell the long history of the Hutterites because this collective identity is what made them unusual migrants. They sought to migrate as a group, in an era in which migration regulation was becoming increasingly individualized. And it was their commitment to a separate group identity—a way of living apart from the world, and from the obligations of citizenship—that was, from the Canadian perspective, the most troubling thing about them as prospective migrants.

This was the era in which selective, individualized immigration control became a global norm. We draw in particular on Adam McKeown’s work on this period, which saw an ideological shift towards the assumption that a nation had a right to absolute control of entry at its border, the development of bureaucratic technologies to assess individuals, and the creation of global standards of health and racial fitness.<sup>2</sup> McKeown’s work is primarily on anti-Chinese laws and racial exclusion; other scholars have further examined how the categories of ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ migrants were developed with reference to exclusion on the basis of gender, sexuality, and health. We add to this work by examining how these developing standards of individual suitability were applied to the Hutterites, a peculiar collective religious group.

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive history and ethnology of Hutterite communities, see: Victor Peters, *All Things Common: The Hutterian Way of Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1965) and John Hostetler, *Hutterite Society* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). For reasons perhaps related to access, both authors are of Mennonite backgrounds. The Hutterites’ own historiographical tradition and records, which provide a detailed and expansive account of the order’s history since its origins, were edited and published by philologist Andreas Johannes Friedrich Zieglschmid: A.J.F. Zieglschmid, *Das Kleingeschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brüder* (Philadelphia: Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1943) and A.J.F. Zieglschmid, *Die Älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder* (Philadelphia: Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1947). For further reading on Hutterite communal life and beliefs, see: Paul F. Conkin, *Two Paths to Utopia: The Hutterites and the Llano Colony* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) and Rod Janzen, *The Prairie People: The Forgotten Anabaptists* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Adam M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

We examine the debate across two days in the Canadian House of Commons in which members discussed the Hutterites' entry into Canada and the question of whether or not the government should take measures to prevent further migration. There we find a consensus among Canadian MPs that the government has the right and duty to exclude unwanted migrants from Canada, albeit with some disagreement over which criteria should be applied. Examining what was said about the Hutterites shows us that Canadian authorities were developing processes of assessing migrants on the basis of their perceived ability to become members of Canadian society. What was in question was whether or not the qualities that held the Hutterites apart—their language, communal way of living, and religious pacifism—should be seen as immutable and thus bar them from admission. Just as the Hutterites were forced to grapple with a new, modern border system, this emerging system was forced to come to an understanding of the Hutterites as a class of migrants with a peculiar group identity. These debates show the development, and some of the ambiguities, of the new regime of migration control in Canada.

### *The History of the Hutterites*

The Hutterites' origins can be traced back to the early years of the Protestant Reformation. In 1528, various smaller Anabaptist groups living outside the Moravian towns of Nikolsburg and Bergen merged together to renounce private property and commit to living together as devout pacifists in self-sufficient communities of goods.<sup>3</sup> Jakob Hutter, a Tyrolian Anabaptist pastor, became these communities' leader in 1533 and presided over the group during a crucial period of its development. Hutter created the first formal guidelines for the organization of Hutterite communities and provided a formative contribution to their pastoral tradition. He preached a total break with the past, a complete communal removal from worldly affairs and considerations, reminding his followers that "they were indeed God's elect, who, as despised sojourners in the world, could only expect hardship and suffering."<sup>4</sup>

Over the next three hundred years the Hutterites would migrate again and again, temporarily enjoying the patronage and protection of feudal lords, only to see conditions change, and be forced once again to migrate due to religious persecution. This journey would take the Hutterites from Moravia (1528–1621), where their 'golden age' transpired, to Transylvania (1621–1767) and Wallachia (1767–1770) where the sect reached the verge of total dissolution, to Russia (1770–1842) and then Ukraine (1842–1874) where the group experienced a spiritual revival and reinvented themselves as specialized agriculturalists.<sup>5</sup> In 1874, the Hutterites, now numbering 1,265 individuals, chose to emigrate en masse to the United

<sup>3</sup> George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 422.

<sup>4</sup> Hostetler, *Hutterite Society*, 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 107.

States of America rather than risk forced conscription as subjects of the nationalizing Russian Empire.<sup>6</sup> They settled in the northwestern United States, modern-day South and North Dakota and Montana, where their communities thrived and rapidly expanded. Although the Hutterites received vague reassurances from the United States government that they would not be required to serve in the military for at least fifty years, the issue was never settled for good through a formal legal exemption.<sup>7</sup> By 1898, fearing that the Spanish American War would lead to mass conscription, Hutterite elders began exploring the possibility of resettling in Canada, even obtaining a special dispensation from the Canadian government freeing them from any obligation to perform military service in the event of their settlement in the country.<sup>8</sup>

Although the Spanish American War did not result in a challenge to the Hutterites' commitment to pacifism, the First World War pushed them into a dramatic standoff with the American government. Despite the Hutterites elders' desperate efforts, young Hutterite men remained eligible for conscription. Declining to compromise and allow their young men to perform the alternative national service offered by the federal government to members of peace churches, the Hutterite elders instructed their draftees not to resist the recruiters by force, but to refuse to obey orders or to put on a military uniform.<sup>9</sup> Tragedy was soon to follow. In May 1918 four young Hutterite men, Joseph, Michael, and David Hofer, and Jacob Wipf were imprisoned at Alcatraz Island where they were subjected to horrific abuse at the hands of military police. In November the four were transferred to a separate military prison in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where Joseph and Michael died from abuse and exposure.<sup>10</sup> Their struggles with the draft board and burgeoning American anti-German sentiment had already led the Hutterite elders to begin to re-explore migrating to Canada. When word of the events at the military prison reached the Hutterite communities, their decision to migrate was guaranteed.

The Hutterites' entry into Canada, however, would be complicated by contemporaneous developments in Canadian immigration politics, a site of shifting understandings of nationality and citizenship. While the brethren quickly managed to purchase land in Canada and resettle their communities, they soon faced political backlash from Canadian nativist groups.<sup>11</sup> In the years of and immediately following the first border crossings, the Hutterites would be thrust into the center of a national debate over the role of immigrants in Canadian society, with policy and enforcement changes threatening the settled Hutterites with deportation and preventing their family members from joining them. The Hutterite community had to

<sup>6</sup> Bradley Armishaw, "The Hutterites' Story of War Time Migration from South Dakota to Manitoba and Alberta," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 28 (2012): 228.

<sup>7</sup> Armishaw, "The Hutterites," 229.

<sup>8</sup> Conkin, *Two Paths to Utopia*, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Hostetler, *Hutterite Society*, 127.

<sup>10</sup> Armishaw, "The Hutterites," 233.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

grapple with alien, modern notions of the nation-state and a lack of understanding for their own particular identity and form of social organization. While they were ultimately able to settle and found communities in Alberta and Manitoba, the Hutterites' trying negotiations with the Canadian state immigration system offers a useful lens for examining a developing international regime of immigration control in the early twentieth century.

### *The History of Migration Control*

In 1999, prominent migration historian Aristide Zolberg wrote that "it is remarkable that the role of states in shaping international migration has been largely ignored by immigration theorists."<sup>12</sup> In the twenty years since, significant work has been done on the history of migration controls—but it could well be argued that this historiography is still not fully connected to other work of migration theory.

Selective, individualized immigration control is now an international norm. That is, each state claims an inherent right to determine who is permitted to enter or remain within its borders. The state asserts this right through a complex legal regime and exercises it through an extensive immigration bureaucracy, which checks the identity and evaluates the desirability of each individual would-be migrant. It is taken for granted that an individual who wants to travel legitimately must carry a passport, a document which Adam McKeown described as "a tangible link between the two main sources of modern identity: the individual and the state."<sup>13</sup> Historians of border controls reveal that normalization of these practices is a relatively recent phenomenon. There is broad agreement that they developed in the period between the 1880s—which saw the introduction of laws against Chinese immigration in the United States and Australia—and the interwar period—which saw the general end of laissez-faire migration and the establishment of the passport as a normative, internationally recognized document.

The Hutterites crossed the border between the United States and Canada during the period in which this system was being codified in North America. These new immigration controls were part of what made this modern journey different from their earlier journeys. As an exceptional group, they provide an interesting window into the period. For Canada—a country still in the process of developing comprehensive migration legislation—the entry of the Hutterites was controversial, resulting in the passage of laws to explicitly exclude them. The debate over these laws shows the development of the norm of selective immigration and the

<sup>12</sup> Aristide R. Zolberg, "Matters of State: Theorizing Immigration Policy," in *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, ed. Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Mckeown, *Melancholy Order*, 1.

shifting and contextual question of which migrants governments consider desirable and which dangerous.

In this article, we draw in particular on Adam McKeown's book *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*. McKeown looks at the processes in the 1880s to the 1910s through which white settler nations—the United States, Canada, and Australia—mutually excluded Asians. He argues that this period is the origin of most of the basic principles of modern border control on two fronts. In terms of ideology, it saw a shift away from principles of free movement to an assumed right of a nation to control entry at its border. The enforcement of anti-Asian laws also led to the systematization of the bureaucratic technologies of identification and record-keeping which are fundamental to modern border control and, indeed, the modern state. The right of a country to exclude Chinese immigrants—which was justified with more or less explicit racism—laid the groundwork for laws to exclude other immigrants deemed to be unsuitable for the national good. McKeown argues that by the 1920s national borders had become the main obstacles to mobility, becoming more important than other factors such as distance and cost.<sup>14</sup> The diffusion of migration laws across the world in this time, he writes, “established individuals as the fundamental object and product of global regulation,” and established “global standards of physical and mental fitness, race, and family.”<sup>15</sup> The Canadian debate about whether or not the Hutterites were suitable migrants is a window into the development of these in a particular time and place. In this way, it adds to the research that looks at other elements in the development of these standards.

McKeown's focus is on the origin of immigration control in racial exclusion—and indeed, the racist underpinnings of migration legislation cannot be ignored. Other historians and legal theorists explore the interaction between migration control and other forms of social classification. Catherine Lee and Kitty Calavita examine the particular effect of early anti-Chinese legislation on Chinese women, and the way in which immigration laws interacted with norms around family structure and women's appearance.<sup>16</sup> Martha Gardner investigates how similar processes were applied to European women migrating to the United States.<sup>17</sup> Eithne Luibhéid's *Entry Denied* takes as its subject the relationship between border control and sexuality. She argues that measures aimed at the exclusion of Chinese women “laid the groundwork for the subsequent delineation and surveillance of

<sup>14</sup> McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, 90.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>16</sup> Kitty Calavita, “Collisions at the Intersection of Gender, Race, and Class: Enforcing the Chinese Exclusion Laws,” *Law & Society Review* 40, no. 2 (2006): 249–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5893.2006.00264.x>; Catherine Lee, “‘Where the Danger Lies’: Race, Gender, and Chinese and Japanese Exclusion in the United States, 1870–1924,” *Sociological Forum* 25, no. 2 (2010): 248–71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2010.01175.x>.

<sup>17</sup> Martha Gardner, *The Qualities of a Citizen: Women, Immigration, and Citizenship, 1870–1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 10.

a whole host of other 'dangerous' sexual figures."<sup>18</sup> Other scholars consider immigration controls based on health—the health and ability of individual migrants, and the metaphoric 'health' of the receiving nation. Ena Chadha looks at the development in Canada of immigration law relating to people with disabilities. She traces how in the early twentieth century mental illness or disability transformed from a family issue to a social one. Increased concern about the quality of migrants and eugenicist ideas about 'mental fitness,' led by 1919 to strict rules barring the entry of migrants deemed 'mentally ill' or 'mentally retarded.'<sup>19</sup>

All of these factors came together into comprehensive immigration codes that sought to exclude various types of people who were seen as racially, morally, or physically unfit, including: those who were deemed racially incapable of assimilating; paupers, who might become a drain on public resources; the sexually immoral; people with contagious illnesses; people with physical or mental disabilities; anarchists and other politically dangerous individuals; and citizens of war-time enemy nations.<sup>20</sup> Counterpoised to these undesirable migrants was the figure of the desirable migrant. The desirable migrant had the capacity to become a citizen—that is, to contribute to the health and the strength of the nation. The development of this ideal migrant was part of the development of modern border controls and the justification of exclusion.

As outlined above, scholars have examined how the categories of 'desirable' and 'undesirable' migrants were developed, with particular work on exclusion on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, and health. There is, however, a gap in research on how this was applied to a religious minority like the Hutterites. Examining the Canadian debates about whether or not the Hutterites were desirable or undesirable migrants can contribute to understanding the development of these categories at the time. It also serves to bring the history of the Hutterites' migration from its niche in Mennonite community history into migration history more broadly.

### *The Canadian Debates*

The debates of the Canadian House of Commons illustrate the change in admission criteria for migrants implemented by the governments of modern nation-states around the turn of the century. There, on April 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 1919, the House of Commons discussed the Hutterites' migration into Canada and whether or not further migration should be prevented by the Canadian government. Also

<sup>18</sup> Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiv.

<sup>19</sup> Ena Chadha, "'Mentally Defectives' Not Welcome: Mental Disability in Canadian Immigration Law, 1859–1927." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>20</sup> Armishaw notes that two individual Hutterites were excluded from Canada under these rules, even when the rest of their colonies were able to migrate. Bradley Armishaw, "The Hutterites' Story of War Time Migration from South Dakota to Manitoba and Alberta," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 28 (2012): 225–246.

addressed in the debate are more general questions of admission criteria. The Canadian government's position on desirable and undesirable migrants becomes clear in the statements by the MPs of the ruling conservative Unionist Party, led by ruling Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden, and those of the Liberal opposition. Their debate offers a connection to the aforementioned historiography.

Almost all speakers declared in different terms that it was the right and the duty of the government to exclude unwanted migrants from Canada. In this they followed the sitting Unionist Minister of Immigration and Colonization, James Alexander Calder, who stated:

We should know best what classes of people we need in this country and what classes we can best assimilate. [...] For this is a domestic question affecting Canada, and we, and we alone, should determine the class of people that we are going to ask to become citizens of this country.<sup>21</sup>

This sentiment reflects the decisive shift in modern migration control away from a general right of free movement towards the sort of modern selection process identified by McKeown as the most important underlying ideological argument behind the modern nation-states' migration regime. The need to translate this ideological goal into reality by creating and supporting a modernized migration control apparatus was voiced by several fellow Unionist MPs during the debate. For example, the conservative Howard P. Whidden from Manitoba called for the "more practical and scientific regulation of immigration, and a realization of the necessity of a national policy [...] of immigration."<sup>22</sup> Before, Minister Calder had declared in similar terms that to execute these regulations more than additional resources would be needed. Calder said:

We must provide the necessary machinery and the necessary experts, and we must have a sufficient number of inspectors and other officers to see that the doors are properly closed against the prohibited classes.<sup>23</sup>

The invoking of 'scientific' criteria and a migration 'machinery' are *signa* of an age deeply pervaded with the language of scientific progress. The use of this vocabulary to describe a change in migration policy and thus to present it as particularly modern should not come as a surprise. Furthermore, it is an important indication of the change in migration policy that occurred and was still occurring at that time. Obviously, the MPs were unambiguously aware of the fact that they

<sup>21</sup> Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, April 29, 1919, MP James Alexander Calder, 1871, [http://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates\\_HOC1302\\_02/845?r=0&s=1](http://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC1302_02/845?r=0&s=1).

<sup>22</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Howard P. Whidden, 1913.

<sup>23</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Calder, 1923.

were in the process of creating a new, formerly unknown system of migration and its control.

McKeown identifies “global standards of physical and mental fitness, race and family” as another important *signum* of the modern border regime. These debates show that in the Canadian case, new, individualized categories for these global standards were developed. Two groups were explicitly mentioned by Calder as definitely undesirable immigrants to Canada:

[O]ur existing law and this Bill provide for the exclusion of certain prohibited classes, which include persons suffering from some loathsome disease, or who are otherwise unhealthy, and those of weak mentality, or of bad character, and criminals and others of that kind.<sup>24</sup>

Here the aforementioned legislation of that same year, identified by Chadha as eugenic and aimed at excluding *mentally unfit* migrants, is communicated straightforwardly. Furthermore, both criteria, health and criminality, also reflect a categorization of migrants according to their individual characteristics and do not categorize them with their whole group. While some consensus existed that these individuals should be excluded, Liberal MP Rodolphe Lemieux of Quebec argued that to do so upon arrival was inhumane. Questioning Minister Calder about the practicalities of these individuals' exclusion, Lemieux recounted an instance of the separation of an immigrant family of several members in his native Quebec, a scene at which he was personally present and could only describe as “heart-breaking.”<sup>25</sup>

This particular rationale for exclusion could also extend beyond individual migrants to entire nationalities or races. Unionist MP Hume Blake Cronyn from Ontario read from a 1916 report by the Commissioner General of Immigration of the United States in which it was argued that these mental illnesses and deficiencies of character were heritable, to wit “with steady increase in the strain...so that the importance of rejecting and expelling this class of immigrant...can hardly be overstated.”<sup>26</sup> Quoting the same report, Cronyn cited figures that show the share of the population of mentally ill in the USA was rapidly rising, implying that this was at least in part due to massive immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe.

Liberal MP Samuel William Jacobs of Quebec responded to a number of points raised by Cronyn, contesting his claims that these immigrants were a significant source of social problems. In a rebuttal to Cronyn's remarks about immigrants and mental illness, Jacobs stated that from what he knew, the number of individuals in insane asylums was far greater in Great Britain and other emigrant nations.

<sup>24</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Calder, 1923.

<sup>25</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Rodolphe Lemieux, 1923.

<sup>26</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Hume Blake Cronyn, 1879.

Here Jacobs' response takes an interesting turn: implicitly linking mental illness and criminality, as Cronyn himself had done, he noted that Canada's jails also detain far fewer individuals percentage-wise than those of emigrant nations. He continues: "speaking for my own particular race, I can point with pride to the Montreal jail, where you will find not a single person of the Jewish race at present incarcerated."<sup>27</sup>

Cronyn's concerns regarding hereditary, unrecognized and yet "latent" mental illness, and Jacobs' response, which more explicitly addresses what he regards as the underlying notions of racial preference, show that the criteria of mental fitness, while assessed on an individual basis, were nevertheless grounds for suspicion about entire groups among the more radical exclusionist camp. Furthermore, it illustrates the process of mediation and negotiation in which these new individualized migration criteria developed.

The overarching principle present in virtually all speeches in the debate, equally announced by the ruling and the opposition party, was that only those migrants willing and able to be assimilated and to become *true* Canadians should be admitted. The principle was put forward first by Minister Calder, who, whilst again reiterating the now commonly shared axiom that Canada alone should decide who is allowed to enter the country, asserted:

If there are any peculiar peoples the world round whose customs and beliefs, whose ideals and modes of life are dissimilar to ours and who are not likely to become Canadian citizens, we have the right to put up the bars and keep them out.<sup>28</sup>

Or in other words, as stated by Unionist MP William A. Buchanan of Alberta:

I look upon a desirable citizen as one who comes into this country prepared to associate with the rest of the people and to assume all the obligations of citizenship. If immigrants fail to do that, then I do not look upon them as desirable citizens, and we should refrain from allowing such classes of people to enter the Dominion of Canada.<sup>29</sup>

Projected onto the Hutterites' case, a wide spectrum of reasons was put forward for regarding the Hutterites as unassimilable. These numerous different reasonings touched upon several key categories of modern migration criteria, illustrating that the process of selecting and testing migrants for their ability to function as a member of the society was in full progress. In his speech MP Thomas Tweedie of Alberta stressed that the main reason the Hutterites could not be assimilated as Canadian citizens and should therefore be denied entry into Canada was their

<sup>27</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Samuel William Jacobs, 1881.

<sup>28</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Calder, 1875.

<sup>29</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP William A. Buchanan, 1914.

peculiar way of communal living and possession. He boldly declared that such principles were not tolerable in Canada: "If there is anything upon which we pride ourselves in this country it is our individual liberty, our individual freedom, and the right to enjoy and to hold property." He then contrasted these ideals with the Hutterites' way of communal living:

These Mennonites and Hutterites who are now coming into this country as individuals have no power to enjoy any such rights; the property which they acquire as the result of their industry and of their labour becomes the property of their association or organization. [...] These people all live together. They live under conditions which are not suitable to our people, and which would not be tolerated by Canadian Citizens.

And finally, summing it all up in strong language:

[T]he future policy of the Government should be to exclude from Canada all classes of people who have communistic ideas. Communism as practiced by people of certain European countries is incompatible with the economic and industrial life of Canada.<sup>30</sup>

Here the commingling of pseudo-scientific criteria and political rejection is presented quite openly. Often this repudiation of the Hutterites' way of communal living was combined with a critique of their supposed tendency to separate themselves from society. This was strongly articulated by Buchanan:

[T]hey want to maintain their own schools, have their own teachers, and perpetuate their own language. I object to that because I think that the only way we can develop good citizens in this country is for the newcomers to acquire a knowledge of the English language in order that they may mingle with the other elements of the population and become good British subjects.

And at another point:

[T]hese people were prepared to admit that under certain circumstances their own laws were above the laws of the State, and that they would refuse to obey the laws of the State if they came into conflict with their own laws. I do not think we should admit people of this type into Canada.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Buchanan, 1941–1942.

<sup>31</sup> *House of Commons Debate*, MP Buchanan, 1913.

It is unclear how much information was actually available to MPs on the Hutterites, Mennonites, and Doukhobours' actual practices; at several points in the debates MPs seem to confuse the various groups, or else entirely conflate them. Early on in the debate, Liberal MP William Daum Euler of Ontario attempted to draw a clear distinction between the Mennonites of Ontario and the Mennonite groups of Western Canada, presenting the Mennonites in his constituency as upstanding and productive Canadian citizens. Euler noted that while the Mennonites of Ontario have retained their language, Pennsylvania Dutch, which they speak among themselves, they have otherwise assimilated into the community. He claimed to have no knowledge of the newer groups out west, but said that:

I should like it to be understood that if the Mennonites in Western Canada object to sending their children to the public schools, there is a distinction between them and those living in Western Ontario.<sup>32</sup>

Minister Calder seemed to concur that members of these religious groups had potential as valuable Canadian citizens, but that their refusal to publicly educate their children was a deal-breaker:

I am well acquainted with many of our Mennonite settlements in Western Canada and the people, and those who have broken away from the old ideas are law-abiding moral living people; they have no bad habits; they are great producers; they are making great progress from many standpoints, and they make very desirable citizens. But so long as a large section of these people hold out from coming under the education laws of the Western provinces, an agitation will prevail to exclude them from entering Canada.<sup>33</sup>

Here the groundwork was implicitly laid for a deal with Hutterite migrants—if acceptance of the public schooling system was what primarily stood in the way of their being welcomed as desirable citizens, a concession here seemed to go a long way towards peaceful cohabitation.

One of the strongest arguments presented against the Hutterites' ability to assimilate into Canadian society was their strict pacifism and its practical ramifications. Several MPs, among them Unionists Daniel Redman of Alberta and George Andrews of Manitoba, who both personally fought as soldiers during the First World War, argued resolutely against the Hutterites' admission. "[W]e must bring into this country men who at the drop of the hat will spring to arms in its defence,"<sup>34</sup> declared Andrews. John Edwards added aggressively:

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<sup>32</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP William Daum Euler, 2571.

<sup>33</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Calder, 2570.

<sup>34</sup> *House of Commons Debates*. MP Daniel Andrews, 1922.

[W]e do not want them to come to Canada and enjoy the privileges and advantages of life under the British flag if they are willing to allow others to do the fighting for them while they sit at home in peace and plenty. We certainly do not want that kind of cattle in this country.<sup>35</sup>

Some speakers also made it abundantly clear that they saw the possible admission of the Hutterites into Canada as an insult to Canadian soldiers and that the soldiers demanded actions against the Hutterites. Andrews, for example, declared: "Our returning soldiers have had the fact driven into them by six-inch shells that citizenship is a question of vital importance, which must be settled."<sup>36</sup> This argument often mixed with a clear anti-German sentiment. Thus, Buchanan for example asserted:

Of course the agitation is strongest with the returned men, and I fully appreciate their point of view. They went across the seas and risked their lives, and they dislike very much to see other men who were not prepared to risk their lives or their money for the freedom and liberty they possessed come and buy land and settle in this country and enjoy all the privileges and protection of Canadian citizenship, and especially as these people are nearly all of German origin and want to perpetuate the German language in Canada.<sup>37</sup>

And later:

I do not think that any one should advocate the giving of the privileges of Canadian citizenship to interned alien enemies belonging to countries that we have been fighting and with which we are still technically at war.<sup>38</sup>

The major obstacles of the Hutterites' inability to become Canadian citizens were not only their pacifist beliefs, but also their German heritage. Tweedie asserted:

I do not believe that this Government, or any government on Canada, would be justified in allowing these people to conduct their commercial, social, religious, or educational life in the German language, or any medium which savours of that tongue. [...] It is very difficult for me to believe [...] when a man uses as a means

<sup>35</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP John Edwards, 1929. For using the word cattle in describing conscientious objectors Edwards was called to order by the chairman after a short but fierce confrontation with the pacifist Liberal MP Isaac Ellis Pedlow from Renfrew South.

<sup>36</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Andrews, 1921.

<sup>37</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Buchanan, 1914.

<sup>38</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Buchanan, 1915.

of intercourse the German language, that he is not so closely allied with the German race and the German people that his sympathies are German.<sup>39</sup>

MP Jacobs presents the Liberal party's objections to this point as well, arguing that ethnic heritage was no particular obstacle to assimilation. He calls the house's attention to the case of the Galician immigrants in Western Canada. Despite hailing from an enemy nation, Austria, and having little education and a primitive way of living, the Galicians raised children who 'made good' in Canada.

We may not be very successful with the parents, but through our public schools we can reach the children, and the second generation will develop into citizens as good as many of those who belong to the so-called better class.<sup>40</sup>

Neither party contested the basic principle, however, that a migrant unable or unwilling to assimilate into Canadian society should be rejected by the government.

It was also a common assumption that migrants to Canada should enrich the Canadian economy and bring with them the means to become economic producers. Calder stated: "Our free lands are largely gone. In the future, if we are to have people go on the land—I am speaking largely of Western Canada—it is very necessary that they should have some capital."<sup>41</sup> The ability to properly work these fertile lands was another oft demanded quality of migrants. Here even the strongly anti-Hutterite MPs of the Unionist Party had to acknowledge that the Hutterites had good qualities. Calder declared: "There is also room in this country for farm labour, both male and female. I think we should endeavor to get as large a number of that class, properly selected, as we can."<sup>42</sup> To this, MPs Robert F. Green of British Columbia—"no one who knows those people can deny that they are sober, industrious and hard working,"<sup>43</sup> and Tweedie—"they are good farmers, they can herd cattle, and their efforts will tend to the agricultural development of this great country"<sup>44</sup>—concurred.

However, this appreciation for the Hutterites' agricultural abilities was almost always accompanied by the caveat that this alone was not enough and that a will to assimilate was also necessary. For instance, MP Whidden stated:

<sup>39</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Tweedie, 1940.

<sup>40</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Jacobs, 1882.

<sup>41</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Calder, 1873.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Robert F. Green, 1914.

<sup>44</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Tweedie, 1941.

These people may bring money with them and may buy some of our best lands, but if they are allowed to come with their peculiar and, to us, false views we may be able to tolerate them, but it would be only toleration.<sup>45</sup>

And Buchanan added:

It is true we want countless peoples to come to the prairies to cultivate the soil and produce wealth, but at the same time, we want more than that; we want people who will make good Canadian citizens, and the qualification of production of crops, production of wealth, is not sufficient in itself.<sup>46</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The 1919 immigration debates in the Canadian House of Commons concerned how best to implement what was unanimously considered to be Canada's national prerogative: to control immigration according to the national interest. The particular criteria for admission or rejection were contested, with MPs from the leading Unionist party favoring a greater number of restricted categories of migrant and MPs from the minority Liberal party opposing a few of these restrictions. Nevertheless, a general consensus prevailed that Canada had the right to refuse entry to those migrants who demonstrated undesirable qualities and would thereby weaken the Canadian nation. Debate over whether specific criteria for exclusion should be drafted to prevent further Hutterite migration largely concerned whether or not the Hutterites could truly become Canadian citizens.

The arguments for exclusion that enjoyed the broadest bipartisan support in the House were those that concerned the Hutterites' willingness to fulfill certain participatory duties that would connect them to Canada as citizens: military service and public education. MPs disagreed over whether the Hutterites' particular religious beliefs, 'German' ethnicity, or commitment to communal living were appropriate grounds for exclusion. The final language of the act that directly regards the Hutterites appears as an expansion on a provision of Canada's Immigration Act of 1906, which already allowed for the exclusion of any specified class of migrants at the Immigration Department's discretion. The new law would:

prohibit or limit in number...immigrants belonging to any nationality or race or immigrants of any specified class or occupation, by reason of any economic industrial or other condition temporarily existing in Canada or because such immigrants are deemed unsuitable having regard to the climatic, industrial, social, educational,

<sup>45</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Whidden, 1923.

<sup>46</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, MP Buchanan, 1913.

labour or other conditions or requirements of Canada or because such immigrants are deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of life and methods of holding property, and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated or to assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship within a reasonable time after their entry.<sup>47</sup>

The Hutterites ‘peculiar customs,’ particularly their commitment to communal living, were thus ultimately deemed likely to prevent their assimilation or assumption of the duties of citizenship.

Within the larger history of migration and the state, the Hutterites’ particular case demonstrates some of the ambiguities of the new regime of migration control in Canada. Migrants were evaluated as individuals; insofar as they were considered to be Canadian citizens in the raw, the secondariness of any previous group membership was virtually taken for granted. However, some of these categories—primarily nationality and race—did not simply disappear, but were increasingly understood as immutable individual qualities which conferred certain characteristics, rather than as anything the individuals could willingly relinquish or renounce.

The nature of the Hutterites’ group membership put them in a peculiar middle ground. Less than an ethnicity and more than a set of political or religious beliefs, the Hutterites could only be referred to by the Canadian government as a ‘specified class’ with unusual customs and practices. They were not considered racially unfit and thus inherently unassimilable, nor were they considered fundamentally disloyal. Because their practices themselves were the reason for exclusion, even to the extent that they were the only way to define the group itself, it seems that the MPs considered the Hutterites essentially unwilling to abandon these practices and become Canadians. Yet this refusal, this unwillingness, is treated as a quality shared by all members of the group, as if it were impossible for the individual Hutterite migrants to give up these practices on their own. As the Hutterites’ communal resilience and high rates of retention attest, this was not a totally inaccurate conclusion. And yet, strangely enough, in taking this group membership to be ironclad, the legislation addresses the Hutterites on their own terms, continuing to treat them as a community and not as a collection of individuals.

All of the qualities that made the Hutterites desirable as individual migrants—industriousness, agricultural skills, ample capital, religiosity—were inextricable from their commitment to communal living, which in turn made it impossible for the Canadian government to treat them as individual migrants. The debates over the Hutterite migration to Canada illustrate how the creation of the modern regime of migration control based on the scientific assessment of individuals was in part

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<sup>47</sup> An Act to Amend the Immigration Act, Statutes of Canada 1919, <https://www.pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/immigration-act-amendment-1919>.

at least the result of ad hoc responses to particular exigencies, even as these responses sometimes contradicted the principles of the new system itself.