

## BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN LAND CONTROVERSY

### INFORMATION FOR THE ALLIED TRIBES.

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The first general meeting of the allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia was commenced at Vancouver on 17th June, continued there on 18th June, again continued at Spence's Bridge on 24th June, and concluded there on 25th June. This letter is now sent out so that all concerned may be informed about the meeting and the principal matters dealt with.

The Tribes actually represented by Delegates were the following:-

Stalo or Lower Fraser Tribe, (from nine different bands) Cowichan (from Quamichan, Kuper Island, etc), Nishga, Squamish, Lower and Upper Lillooet, Lower and Upper Thompson or Couteau, Shuswap (all the divisions) Okanagan, and Similkameen.

The Vancouver Island Tribes were represented only at Vancouver, and the Nishga Tribe was represented only at Spence's Bridge.

Some of the delegates of the Nishga Tribe were prevented from attending. Mr. Timothy L. Derrick of Aiyansh, however, brought both by letter and by word of mouth assurances that the whole Tribe would stand behind all plans that might be decided upon for carrying forward the Indian case. Very similar assurances were received from the Haida, Bella Coola, Tahltan, Carrier, Chilcotin, and Kutenai Tribes.

The present position of the various matters set out in the Statement prepared for the Government of Canada in February last was reported, and it was made clear that the situation is one of great urgency arising more especially from the plans for settling soldiers on all the best lands before adjusting the matter of lands to be reserved for the Indians and the proposed treaty regarding fisheries between Canada and the United States, under which if adopted every Indian along the Fraser River and its tributaries will be prohibited from taking salmon above tidal water even as food for himself and family.

Mr. O'Meara made a report regarding work done during three weeks spent in England. An eminent English Counsel has now become associated with Mr. O'Meara, and with his help the heavy work of dealing with the communication received from the Lord President of His Majesty's Privy Council has been entered upon. The new Counsel strongly approved the position taken by the allied Tribes in refusing to accept the terms proposed by the Government of Canada and seeking independently to bring their case before the Judicial Committee. He expressed the opinion that by accepting the Government's terms the Tribes would surrender the land rights claimed by them.

Mr. O'Meara explained the reply which in April was sent to the Lord President, as result of which together with expected discussions at Ottawa and in England it will, as is hoped, be made clear that, as no Canadian court has power to hear the Indian case and decide the Indian Land controversy, the Nishga Petition should be brought directly before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

Mr. O'Meara and myself made a report regarding the interview which we had with Premier Oliver at Victoria on the 11th June. Upon that occasion Mr. Oliver fully recognized that the Indians have their case before the Privy Council, and said that they should proceed with it, as in his opinion that is the only course really open. The view so expressed is of great importance to the allied Tribes. For years the main ground, practically the only ground, upon which the Government of Canada refused to help the Indians in carrying forward their case has been the opposition of British Columbia. Now we have reason to expect that no such opposition will be met with.

The Report of the Royal Commission was brought before the meeting and many matters connected with that Report and its findings affecting various districts of the Province were explained. It was the unanimous opinion of all present that the Report has done nothing serious towards settling even the one matter of lands to be reserved.

A carefully prepared summary of the plans by which the work of the allied Tribes has been carried on was submitted. Also important new plans by which it is hoped the allied Tribes may be greatly helped in successfully completing their work were presented and approved.

It is expected that in pursuance of plans adopted in October last a small delegation will during next fall go to Ottawa as well as other Canadian cities for the purpose of making the Indian cause better known and taking all possible steps for promoting it. It has now been decided that the delegation so to be sent will place in the hands of the Governor General of Canada a Memorial intended for His Majesty the King answering the letter by which the Duke of Connaught as his Majesty's Representative gave assurances that the Nishga Petition would be considered by the Privy Council, if the Nishga Tribe should not be willing to accept as a settlement the findings of the Royal Commission.

Steps recently taken by the Indian Department gravely affecting the rights of the Lower Fraser Tribe in respect of the Reserve known as Seabird Island, which if they be not vigorously dealt with threaten to deprive the Tribe altogether of that valuable Reserve, were brought before the meeting. It was decided to support strongly the protests which the seven Bands specially interested have sent to the Indian Department, and Mr. O'Meara was authorized to take all possible action at Ottawa for safeguarding the rights of the Tribe.

Careful consideration was given to the subject of funds. Statements regarding funds received and funds expended were presented by both Mr. O'Meara and myself. It was decided that steps be taken to consolidate, as one Fund bearing interest, all moneys which have been or shall hereafter be provided by Tribes, together with all moneys already advanced and all moneys which shall hereafter be advanced by individuals, whether such moneys shall be advanced by Indians or by white persons.

By a letter received from the Finance Committee of the Society of Friends of the Indians it was shown that, as soon as the matter of funds advanced by the Society and Mr. O'Meara shall have been adjusted in pursuance of plans adopted in October last, Mr. O'Meara would cease to act as Representative of the Society and devote himself exclusively to the work of advising the allied Tribes and acting as their advocate, and Mr. Walter A. Geddes of Calgary, recently appointed Special Representative, instead of acting as at present in a temporary way, would become Representative and devote his whole time to the Society's work.

Of the amount of new funds to be raised by allied Tribes decided upon in October last, namely \$12,500. we have now secured about one-half. It is most important that before 30th September next the other one-half should be secured. It is hoped also that before that date a considerable amount will have been secured by means of advances made by individual Indians towards the amount of \$25,000. which in October last it was decided to secure by means of advances. If these hopes be fulfilled, the result will be to put the allied Tribes in a position to carry out strongly and with good hope of success the plans which have been made.

The meeting appointed an Executive Committee of the allied Tribes consisting of the following:-

Rev. P.R. Kelly, J. A. Teit, W. Nahani, D. S. Peter,  
The Chairman of the Land Committee of the Nishga Tribe, the  
Secretary of the Land Committee of the Nishga Tribe, George  
Matheson, Alexander Leonard and Stephan Raitasket.

J. A. Teit was chosen Convenor and it was agreed that the Chairman and Secretary of the Nishga Tribe should have the right to appoint substitutes to attend meetings. It was also agreed that in the event of any of the appointees being unwilling or unable to act on the Committee that the remainder of the Committee have power to appoint others in their places.

Spence's Bridge, B.C.  
22nd July, 1919.

J. A. TEIT,  
Special Agent.