

My friend / The Indians of British Columbia.
We have received the following letter from the founder of
the Methlakelta mission: C133/50

33 Finsbury Circus

London E.C. 5 March 1886

Dear Sir

I beg to address you on behalf of the
Tsimshian, and other Indian tribes inhab-
iting the Northern portion of British Columbia,
with a view of soliciting, on their account, the
sympathy and aid of the Aborigines Protection
Society in connection with their land interests.

From authoritative Government documents
in Canada it is clearly demonstrable that the
Indian land question in British Columbia
is in a very unsatisfactory state, owing as it
would seem, to the arbitrary and unprecedented
policy adopted by the Government in regard to it.

It appears that the Imperial Edicts and
usages which have always defined and
guarded Indian land rights in Canada
are by the Provincial Government of British
Columbia virtually ignored; - the Indian title
is not recognised, nor any treaties with
Indians made; but an absolute control of
all the lands of the Province is assumed
in the name of the Queen, as if the Aborigines
were a conquered race, and all their ancient
inheritances had been confiscated.

These anomalies have been pointed
out to the Provincial Government by the
Minister of Justice, and the Minister of Interior
in Canada in the years 1874 and 1875 (See
Sessional Papers & Blue Book) but apparently
without effect.

The Indians themselves have been, till
late, comparatively silent on Land matters.

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Their silence may be ascribed partly to their ignorance of the Government policy, and partly because the question had not been directly forced upon their attention by any great encroachment upon their ancient privileges, owing to the sparseness of white settlers, as yet, in the North of the Province.

A change however in this respect has taken place. The Indians are now fully alive to the importance of the land question, and its bearing on their prosperity and social progress.

The action of the Government, which more than anything else, precipitated this change, was their ordering the survey of two acres of land in the centre of the Indian village of Ketlakahitta, for the purpose of conveying the same to a Religious Society, and thereby asserting their claim to absolute authority over the land, - even a village site, - in spite of the Indians' protest.

Though the Indian proprietors were greatly incensed by this overbearing act of injustice, I am happy to say that no violence was offered to the Government servants who made the survey. The Indians decided rather to appeal to the Law, and trust in the justice of their case.

Legal advice was obtained from one of the most prominent lawyers in Victoria; who after referring to the Sessional Papers of Canada & the Imperial Edicts says - "hence it is I think apparent that Indians cannot be molested in their possessions of land occupied by them prior to the advent of white men unless in pursuance of treaties duly entered into by them"

When the legal opinion was shown to the Pro. Government - they requested the Indians might not be made acquainted with it; and offered to hand over the two acres of land to the Indians, if the Dominion Government would ask them to do so.

This concession, was evidently only an attempt to shift responsibility on to the Dominion Government. (for so did the Premier of Canada regard it) hence nothing came of it.

The Indians then determined, before invoking the Law, to represent their case to the Indian Department, and three Indian Delegates were accordingly sent to Ottawa last summer.

The result of this appeal to the Sup^r General of Indian Affairs was, to return to the Indian Complainants an assurance that their grievances would receive careful attention, and that steps would be taken which it was hoped would soon remove the causes of complaint.

It is now about seven months since these assurances were made, but no remedy of the evils complained of is forthcoming; and I fear there is little prospect of any remedy being found without an appeal to the Law.

I am hoping to return to Mel-lakah-ta early in next month, and I should be very glad if on my arrival there, I can inform the Indians that the Aborigines Protection Society had decided to aid them in vindicating their rights; and thus afford them a proof ^{that} there are in England - those who take pleasure in defending the weak and helping the poor without regard to race or nationality.

I remain Dear Sir

Yours very faithfully
W. Duncan

F. W. Chesson Esq
Sec^y Aborigines Prot Soc^y
London.