

Indian Reserve Commission
British Columbia
March 2nd 1878

The joint Commission of the local and Dominion Governments for the settlement of the Indian land difficulties in British Columbia was established in August 1876 and the Commission was organized and commenced their labors in September of that year.

In January 1877 the Government of British Columbia strongly recommended (with a view to diminish the heavy expense of the Commission) that it should be reconstructed upon a more economical basis submitted by them. The Dominion Government assented to this suggestion and an Order in Council, dated 23rd of February 1877, was accordingly passed by which it was provided "that the labours of the Commissioners should be restructured to those places where the whites and natives are living in close proximity and to those localities where the Indians are dissatisfied with the area of land of which they now hold possession."

This portion of the labor of the Commissioners it was hoped

might

might be completed before the close the year.

It was further provided that after the dissolution of the Commission the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in their respective localities should apportion as soon as practicable all the lands remaining unallotted or unreserved by the present Commissioners, such apportionment to be subject to the approval of the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works of British Columbia acting on behalf of the Local Government, and in the event of any difference between the Superintendents and the Chief Commissioner as to the extent or locality of the lands to be allotted, the matter might be referred to one of judges of the Supreme Court of that Province whose decision should be final.

In the month of June last the Commissioners were dispatched from Victoria where up that time they had been employed, into the Interior in consequence of reports having reached the Department that great uneasiness and discontent prevailed among the Indian Tribes in the neighbourhood of Kamloops, and that the white settlers were apprehensive of a general rising in the tribes. It was consequently thought

necessary

necessary that the Commissioner should without loss of time proceed to the locality and deal with the disaffected Indians. The Commissioners seem to have accomplished their work with signal success. They succeeded in allaying the fears and calming the discontent existing among the Indians and effectually broke up, for the time at least, the dangerous and widespread confederacy existing among the Sushwap and Okanagan Indians in the South Western portion of the Province.

In dealing with their special work the adjustment of the land difficulties the Commissioners appear to have exercised great judgement, tact firmness and patience, disposing of the many complicated questions upon which they had to adjudicate, questions involving frequently conflicting claims of Indians and white settlers, in such a manner as to give general satisfaction to all the parties interested. Indeed the Commissioners would seem to have gained the confidence and good will of all the Indian Communities with which they have come in contact and the neighbouring Indian Tribes whom they have not yet visited are anxiously looking forward to their advent amongst them.

Owing to the lateness of the

season

season at which the Commissioners commenced their work last year they were unable (altho they carried on their labours very late into the winter) to accomplish the whole of the task which the Order in Council contemplated they could finish in the year.

Such being the actual position of affairs the local Government of British Columbia now urge that the change in the organization of the Commission contemplated by the order in Council, of the 23rd February last, be now carried out and that the apportioning of the lands remaining unallotted to the Indians should be made by the Indian Superintendants in their several Superintendencies subject to the approval of Chief Commissioner of Lands and works in British Columbia with power of reference in case of difference between the Superintendents and Commissioner to one of the judges of the Supreme Court.

With the additional knowledge which we now possess, from the detailed reports of the Commissioners, of the critical condition of affairs among the Indian tribes in the Interior of British Columbia and of the many difficulties which beset the question of assigning the Reserves in such a way as to satisfy the white settlers and the natives, it is submitted that it would be highly

[illegible word]

[illegible word] and inexpedient to bring into effect the arrangement proposed by the Order in Council last cited until all the reserves in the vicinity of white settlements are made for the following reasons amongst others.

1st If the Indian Superintendents^{are} appointed to perform this work they would of necessity be compelled to absent themselves from their offices during a large portion of the year and the regular work of the their office would consequently of necessity be neglected.

It is much to be feared that the proposed arrangement or any other involving an entire change in the personel of the Commission would utterly fail to give satisfaction to the Indians who, as has been already stated, have entire confidence in the Commission as at present organized. There are not wanting abundant indications that such would be the result. A petition have already been forwarded to the Department through the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia from one of the Kamloops Chiefs strongly urging the continuance of the Indian Commission on its present basis, and since this Memorandum was penned a letter has been received from M^r Sproat covering a

communication

communication addressed to him by the Roman Catholic Bishop [illegible word] of Kamloops very earnestly deprecating any change in the Commission "The Indians,"
would regard a change of Commissioners as a change of policy, and that change would be

writes the Bishop a fatal blow to the whole scheme.

Bearing in mind then the wide spread discontent which prevailed last year among the Indian Communities in British Columbia, the general distrust of the Indians in the feelings of the Government towards them; recollecting how narrowly the Province escaped last year from very [illegible word] Indian complications involving possibly a general rising of the Indians, it is a matter of paramount importance not merely in the interest of British Columbia but of the Dominion itself, that no steps should now be taken which would be calculated to again disturb the Indian mind and bring about a renewal of those feelings of distrust and discontent now happily allayed by the judicious conduct of the Commission during the past season.

Viewing the question therefore as a question not affecting the Indian population merely, or even the interest of British Columbia by itself but one involving grave national consideration, it

seems

seems to me that the possible economy resulting from the proposed modification of the Commission is out weighted by the grave national complications which might result from the change.

It is therefore recommended that, instead of assigning the task of primarily allotting the Reserve to the Indian Superintendents in their respective Superintendancies, as proposed by that Order in Council of the 23rd February 1877, the present Commissioner M^r Sproat be appointed to discharge that important duty, subject to the approval of the Commissioner of Lands and Works of British Columbia, and in the event of any difference between the Commissioner and M^r Sproat, the matter to be referred to one of the Judges of the Supreme Court as provided by that Order in Council.

By this means the continuity of the present Commission would be preserved and the Indians would have a guarantee that the same policy which has hitherto guarded the Commission in dealing with their Reserves would be continued in the future.

Moreover the experience acquired during the past 18 months would

enable

enable M^r Sproat to discharge the task assigned to him not only more satisfactorily to the Indians but also more rapidly and therefore more economically than could be done by the Superintendent or any other person appointed for the first time.

The whole respectfully submitted

(Sig^d) D. Mills