

Deputation of Indian Representatives 459904
from Tribes in British Columbia, upon Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

Parliament House,

Ottawa, April 27th, 1916.



The Members of the delegation were introduced by Rev. A.E.O'Hearn, of Victoria, B.C., and they were cordially received by Sir Wilfrid.

In addition to having been heard himself Mr. J.A. Teit, Spencer Bridge, B.C., of the Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey of Canada, acted as interpreter to several of the speakers and as such performed the duties devolving upon him in a most lucid and intelligent manner.

Chief Charles Barthle Barton, of the Nishga Tribe, B.C., was first heard. He said: The Right Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, I must thank you for the honour of appearing before you to today and also to convey the thanks of the other members of the delegation present for the privilege of presenting our claims to you. Our reason for coming before you is to present what we claim our just rights. The matter has been brought before both Governments from time to time and in early years all native rights were admitted by the different members of the Government of Canada. The Minister of Justice in 1875, Judge Fournier, gave his opinion on the claims of the British Columbia Indians as well as did Mr. David Laird, Minister of the Interior in the same year. In 1876 Lord Dufferin gave his opinion on the same rights. Things had gone on until 1870 when the British Columbia Government made a change which caused a great dispute to arise among the British Columbia Indians. Therefore in 1887 a delegation from the Nishgas and Tsimpshans tribes appeared before the Dominion and the British Columbia Governments in Victoria, B.C. and on the 3rd of February the

first interview took place and also on the 8th of February another interview. The members present at that interview were Premier Smythe and the Hon. Mr. Davey, the Attorney-General, and the Hon. John Robson, Provincial Secretary, and others, including Hon. Dr. Power, Supt. General Indian Department and Hon. Judge O'Reilly. Towards the end of the last interview Honourable Mr. Davey gave his decision, telling us that when British Columbia became part of Canada the agreement made between the two Governments was that the Dominion Government was to take charge of the Indians and look after them. He also stated that if the Dominion and British Columbia Governments could not agree to the petition of the Indians of British Columbia, then it was to be referred to England. Ever since this time we have been standing on our claims. Our claim principally at this time was that justice be dealt us and also we demanded there should be a treaty made with the people, but up to today it has never been carried through. Also our petition asks for the rights of Canadian citizenship-- this we never got. I myself was one qualified to take the same stand as a white man and I have made three applications in order that I may exercise such right, but it has never yet been granted.

Now then, Right Honourable Sir, knowing that the agreement between the two Governments stated that the Dominion Government was to take charge of the Indians and look after them we therefore know that the Dominion Government is our trustee and we cannot expect anything but that we can get help from the honourable Dominion Government. During all these years nothing definite was done but we are glad to know that the Dominion Government has appropriated by Parliament \$5,000 to help the land question, but up to the present this money has never yet been given over to us. Of late years we have the grand visit of you, Sir Wilfrid,

to Prince Rupert in 1910, when we were encouraged in the hope of our case going before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and there meeting with success. There were also notices given and sent around by the Department to the Nishgas explaining to the different tribes in British Columbia that their case should go right on to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. We still have the sense or idea of going before the Judicial Committee to decide our rights.

In 1875 the report of the Minister of Justice declared that the claims were well founded and that to fail to recognize the rights of the natives would be to ignore the honour and good faith of the Crown. This is a noble opinion and we must say this noble opinion, given by other Ministers as well, in our favour is appreciated by the Nishgas and members of other tribes that accompany us here today.

Before going any further I will ask Chief Andrew Mercer of the Nishga tribe to address you.

Chief Andrew Mercer of the Nishga tribe (by interpreter)

Right Honourable Sir Wilfrid Laurier, we know that there is a greater power here in Ottawa than what they have in British Columbia. It is very hard for us to reach you and to come all this way before you and try to explain our situation. We therefore pray, Right Honourable Sir, that you will take up our case and look into it thoroughly. This case has been laid down many times before different Governments and we therefore come before you with this humble and most sincere petition.

We know that the Government in power takes up the weak man's case and helps him through. That is the way we hope it is and we trust that we poor natives will have justice dealt us.

Our people are praying that God will help us to make clear before you all things concerning our case and that it will be looked into and a settlement arrived at. The difference between this petition and the British Columbia petition is this, that the Nishgas want their tribal ownership rights as far as they always had them. We are not coming before you asking for the rights of the whole of British Columbia because there is another society looking after that. Another thing, in early years there have been treaties made with some of the tribes in British Columbia but with the Nishgas nothing has been done to make any treaty or settlement up to the present and the tribes that come in with us on our petition hope to be dealt with in the same way. The Nishgas before doing so employed counsel and we were advised by the friends of the Indians and also of the Indian Affairs Committee and the Social Council of Canada. We did not wish to make any mistake in the method of going after our rights--we want to go after them according to the law and in peace.

Canada always stood by the natives until we were forced back from our settlements which made a great change among us, and I may say that the Royal Commission which was sent out, we were afraid to appear before that Royal Commission. We therefore sent delegates to Ottawa concerning the matter and discussed the matter with some of the members of the Government. Finally we were advised by counsel and also by the Indian Affairs Committee and Dr. Roche, the Minister of the Interior, has promised that if we did wait on a Royal Commission it would not prejudice our case, that our case would still go on in the Courts. And we took his advice and received the Royal Commission as warm friends together. We made a full statement before them but when the Royal Commission gave their answer they told us they had no power to deal with the land disposed by the province in any way.

At the time of waiting on the Royal Commissioners there also arose the occasion of presenting our claim and they advised us to go to Ottawa and lay our statement before the Government at Ottawa before their report would come out.

We therefore begged the Government at Ottawa to hold back the report of the Royal Commission regarding the Eishgas' claim. In June, 1914, an Order-in-Council was made by the Government and was sent to us-- we looked carefully into the said Order-in-Council and we did not agree with it for this reason: we made our proposal and we placed it before the Council, but it was not according to the agreement between the two Governments-- therefore our proposal was rejected. In 1915 an Order-in-Council was also passed by the Government of Canada which bound us to accept the finding of the Royal Commission without knowing what the finding would be and before our rights should be declared. We therefore now beg to give our answer to this Order-in-Council of June 1915, and beg to declare our ~~pp~~ unanimous objection to the said Order-in-Council. That is all I have to say.

Chief Andrew Charles Barton: Before I will say any more I will call on Mr. James A. Teit, interpreter for the interior Indians.

Mr. Teit said:

The people I represent wish me to say two or three words on the subject of their claim. In the first place they wish to thank you for this interview which you have kindly given and to say that they, the interior Indians, are a separate group and that they are not here as representatives of the Association of British Columbia. They also wish to say that there are four of them to speak to you-- the same who spoke previously before Sir Robert Borden-- each belongs to a different tribe.

Chief John Chelahitss of the Okanagan Tribe (by interpreter)

Sir Wilfrid, I am very glad to meet you-- I had the pleasure of meeting you before. I will tell you of my father who preceded me as Chief of the Okanagans and of my grand-uncle who was head chief of the Okanagans when the Hudson Bay Co. came first to Canada. He was recognised as the Chief and had medals from the English kings and other tokens given him. My father was Chief when British Columbia was made into a province, and it was my father who negotiated with the authorities in regard to affairs of the Indians. There was a Mr. Sproat who came to my father and said; I am looking for the Chief of this country. I carry with me the authority of the Queen and I wish to speak about the lands. My father said: I am Chief in this country and tell me what the Queen has to say. He said: it was the wish of the Queen that you point out to me the part of your country that you wish to reserve for yourself. My father said: why does the Queen thus speak? And he answered that the Queen sent him to explain that many people would come to the country soon and it was the Queen's wish that the Indians might be provided

for as there might be trouble otherwise and he expressed to my father that there should be no fear on his part in any way but that the Queen's laws would be carried out justly, and he explained about what they intended doing if the Queen's laws were carried out stating that it would be well for them. My father said if we cannot come to an agreement on all points, would it be possible for me to appeal to the Queen? To which Mr. Sproat answered yes, and the Queen will do well by you and look after you all. My father asked Mr. Sproat in the event of my death what will become of our talk? And Mr. Sproat said: what we say now will be written and will be always kept to be seen and if the Queen and you die, it will be on record. He said, if you consent to this, the Queen will look after you always. The Chief understood Mr. Sproat to mean that he would deal with the land only and he asked Mr. Sproat what about the other rights of the Indians, the game, etc? And Mr. Sproat said these would be dealt with afterwards. The Queen is now dead and my father is dead. Not very long after this we saw that things did not come out as we expected in regard to our lands and therefore we became dissatisfied and convinced that something was wrong, and then I became Chief and I thought I would try to find out where the wrong was and I went on a trip to Europe with a priest and saw different chiefs on the way. I went to London, Paris and Rome but the only chief I saw was the Pope-- the priest did not seem willing that we should see the chiefs of the different countries. I was disappointed and I was told Ottawa was the place to go and later I came to see Sir Wilfrid Laurier. I was told I should write what I had to say and present it to Sir Wilfrid or send it. So I came here on one trip with another Chief and saw Sir Wilfrid and Mr. Pedley and afterwards when the Borden Government came in I made up my mind to come with other chiefs and see Mr. Borden. Mr. Borden said he was favourably impressed with what we said and the

Government would take it up, but that he was newly in office and did not know much about it then. I was one of the Chiefs who saw you, Sir Wilfrid, at Kamloops, at the time of your visit to British Columbia and it was my brother who presented the petition from the interior Indians which was handed to you.

We cannot understand how the Government should take so long to deal with our rights. I believe if the Laurier Government had remained in power it would have been fixed up by this time and I do not understand how it is that it has not been fixed yet. Sir Wilfrid, I wish you to know that we have nothing, or hardly anything, fixed up right for us in British Columbia.

Chief Basil David of the Sheeswap Tribe (by interpreter)

Sir Wilfrid Laurier I am very glad to have an opportunity of meeting you here today. We have felt for a very long time that things have not been right with us in British Columbia-- that there is something wrong because we have not got our rights. For thirty years we have felt this way and some of our chiefs have gone hither and thither to find out where to get the matter remedied. Some went to Victoria and others to different Government agencies. We said to ourselves, who can it be who is chief or who can fix all these matters up; we felt things were getting worse for us. It is ten years now or a little over since we considered the question very hard and there were delegates chosen on the coast, two chiefs, to go and find where the great White Chief was, and I was chosen from the interior to accompany them.

We had always heard the Whites from the earliest times speak of the Queen and we considered the Queen was the great chief, but we knew the Queen was dead but we believed her son was there and we thought he was the great chief and we turned to go and see him. Therefore these two coast chiefs and myself went to see the king. We wished to

He speak with him and we went to England and saw King Edward.
He shook hands with us and called us his children and spoke
very nice words to us. The paper we bore with us when we
went to England Lord Strathcona had looked at. Lord
Strathcona told us to return and take our paper to Ottawa
and the Ottawa Government would deal with it, that there was
a great Chief at Ottawa and his name was Laurier. And we
returned to Ottawa-- we had no guide and travelled alone.
We could not get access to the chief so we returned to
British Columbia, and we returned to Ottawa afterwards and
saw Mr. Borden in 1912.

We just wish to explain to you our rights and to
express ^{the} gratitude and pleasure it gives us to
present our claims to you today.

Chief James Haisket of the Lillooet Tribe (two interpreters)

Sir Wilfrid, I am pleased to meet you and I will tell you about our affairs. We have come here to help the Hishga people. I prefer that the question of Indian titles should be dealt with in England-- we do not wish to surrender our title until the question of our title is decided, and we know as to whether we have any title or not.

We are not satisfied with the Order-in-Council.

The Order-in-Council does not embrace all our wants-- it leaves out much of what we ask for.

One objection we have to the Order-in-Council is we have had no say about it and have not been asked about it and have not been consulted in it in any way. The agreement and law has been made altogether without considering us, as if it had been made behind our backs. It deals only with the Reserves, and another thing is the Order-in-Council says it will be a final settlement-- we cannot accept it as final because there are so many things we have spoken about that are not noticed in the Order-in-Council. For instance there is nothing said regarding our rights to game and fishing and things like that. The Order-in-Council also is not explicit regarding the terms 'benefit' and 'compensation'.

The Order-in-Council forces us and we object to being forced that way-- it is not like an agreement between one man and another, but they force us and say we must accept it.

We do not wish to accept the terms of the Order-in-Council.

We sent in two statements made by the Indians at Spencer Bridge in which we asserted our objections to the Order-in-Council.

If the Government were to bring forward any proposal which we would consider to be fair we would be willing at any time to accept it, but if the Government has no other proposal except that of the Order-in-Council we see no other way except to try every way possible to get our matter before the

English Privy Council to secure its settlement.

Another word, and the last word-- since I came to Ottawa I have heard the Dominion Government are now laying claim to the indian reserve foreshores, and we understood we always owned the foreshores, and if that is true it will take away much value from the Reserves. We can explain how it will do this.

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Chief John Tedlenitse, of the Couteau Tribe (by interpreter)

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, I have come here to Ottawa before, but this is the first time I have seen you Chief Laurier and I am glad to know you now.

If everything had been going smoothly with the Indians and between the Whites and the Indians, we would not be here today. But things have not been going good. I am Chief of a tribe, the head chief of which in 1858, saved the country from war, when the indians were about to combine and drive out the whites. At that time the head chief spoke strongly for peace and after a few skirmishes he accomplished his point and the interior tribes quieted down, and the white people were taken by the hand by the Head Chief.

The head chief of my tribe invited the whites as guests into his house to sit by his fire and to use his fire, which meant that they were allowed to use that country on equal terms with themselves. The indians thought everything after that would work smoothly between themselves and the whites, and expected the two races to share together like and like, but it was not long before we found that the whites did not attempt to do that and things got from bad to worse and at last the people thought we must go to Ottawa and see Laurier and fix matters up;

We petitioned you, and your Commissioner, Mr. McDougall, came among us and saw everything. Not long afterwards the Government changed at Ottawa and Mr. Borden is now chief and we wondered what he intended doing regarding us and therefore we came to Ottawa and saw him-- we saw Mr. Borden in the Parliament House that is now burned but he said he had only been in office a short time and did not understand the question yet, but would go into it thoroughly and would get the matter fixed up.

Then we heard Mr. McKenna had been appointed Commissioner and he came out, and then we heard of the appointment of a Commission of five. Mr. McKenna came out and told us that he had been sent out to look into the matter and that it was a proposal of the Government that where the reserves were too small they should be added to, and where too large, they should be cut up-- he said he had nothing to do with the question of title and he led us to understand we really had no right and that the whites were above us in this country and had better rights than we had.

At that meeting I asked Mr. McKenna about the whites having better rights in the country than us-- we told Mr. McKenna we did not wish to hold the whole of British Columbia as a possession and drive out the whites-- that all we wanted was a better chance of living and progressing-- our mode of life is changing and we must have means to progress accordingly and will require help in this way-- we require more land and want to be put on a good footing.

We heard the Hais Indians were coming to ask for something worth having and we came here with them and we are all working together in the same way.

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Chief Charles Barthle Barton:

We thank your Right Honourable Sir for listening to our humble representations laid before you and just before closing I may just say a few words.

We feel that we are going on with this a long time and we feel that it should go beyond the power of the Indian Department. We hope that you will put the matter before Parliament and the people of Canada.

Now, with reference to our petition-- it is a very small one. We only want to have our tribe ownership rights and nothing outside of that and if the Government of Canada is not prepared to help us we trust it will be left open for us to place an independent petition directly to His Majesty's Council and in this event we hope the Government will not oppose us and will let us go on to the Privy Council. I also beg to remark that in regard to the agreement of Mr. McKenna it ignores our claim which disputes the report of 1875, and ignores the honour and good faith of the Crown. As to Mr. Scott's proposal, which built up the foundation of his opinion it ignores our rights and we do not consider that he has power to deal with the matter but that it should go to the Judicial Committee of his Majesty's Privy Council.

I will close with thanks and with the hope that some good will arise from this delegation today.

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Sir Wilfrid Laurier;

I am sorry gentlemen, that my time is limited—
I have another engagement. You all know already that I
am no longer chief, but tell them, Mr. Interpreter, that
what the Government can do for them to promote their wel-
fare I will be glad to sanction with all my power.

Thereupon the deputation withdrew.

Personnel of Deputation.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier in receiving the deputation
was accompanied by Honourable Senator Bostock.

The Delegates of the Nishga tribe were:

Chief Charles Bathle Barton, Kinsoloth, Nass River,
Chief Andrew Mercer, Aigansh, Nass River.

A. E. O'Meara accompanied the delegates of the Nishga Tribe
as Counsel.

The Interior tribes, with the delegates representing them,
were as follows:

Mr. J.A. Teit,	Interpreter.
Okanagan Tribe,	Chief John Chelashitsa,
Sheswap Tribe,	Chief Basil David, Chief Elie La Rue,
Gouteau Tribe,	Chief John Tedlenitsa,
Lillooet Tribe,	Chief James Baitasket, Chief Thom. Adolphe, Delegate William Pierre,

Benjamin Franklin

Stenographer