
RETURN

To an Order of the House for copies of all correspondence between the Provincial and Dominion Governments, or any official thereof, since 1st March, 1901, on the subjects of:—

1. The administration of minerals under Indian Reserves:
2. The adjustment and reduction in size of Indian Reserves.

EDWD. GAWLER PRIOR,
Minister of Mines.

Department of Mines,
18th April, 1902.

OTTAWA, 2nd April, 1901.

SIR,—Adverting to your letter to me of the 2nd February last, in which, *inter alia*, you suggest the appointment of a Commission to readjust Indian Reserves in British Columbia, I beg to state that while I consider the position of both Governments in respect to lands set apart for Indians rather unsatisfactory, I fear that the remedy suggested would be slow and expensive, while lacking the most desirable element of finality. The Commission could scarcely undertake to deduct from or add to Indian Reserves without making an examination; and the time that has been consumed in the allotting of the reserves under the agreement, a work which has not yet been completed, will give a fair measure of the time it would take the proposed Commission to complete its work, and at the end of its labours it might be shown that there was as good reason for its beginning all over again as there was for its starting.

As you will observe on looking at the papers of record the Reserve Commission was formerly a joint one, but the Province, finding the bearing of its share of the expense too great a burden, suggested a change, with the result that a single Commissioner was appointed and his remuneration and expenses borne solely by the Dominion. His allotments were made subject to confirmation by the Commissioner of Lands and Works, and the work of allotting and confirming still goes on. If the suggested Commission were appointed, we would be actually starting a review of the work before it is completed.

When the question is taken up, it seems to me it would be better to take it up with a view to getting rid of the reversionary right by an agreement under which such lands as might be agreed upon as necessary to meet the requirements of the Indians should be held by the Dominion for them, in the same manner as Indian Reserves are held in other Provinces.

The reversionary right, which is an impediment to the administration of Indian affairs in British Columbia, was not created of the motion of the Province. It is clear that the Provincial authorities, when negotiations were entered into for the setting aside of reserves for Indians, were prepared to set apart what they considered a reasonable acreage of land for each band without any intimation of a reversion. It was on the suggestion of Mr. Duncan, a missionary, that the unsatisfactory arrangement out of which the reversionary right was made.

(Signed) CLIFFORD SIFTON.

Hon. James Dunsmuir,
Victoria, B. C.

