

In early November of 1985 The Native Brotherhood of B.C. declared war on the Social Credit government. The president of the Brotherhood, Edwin Newman, said they would use Expo 86 as an opportunity to tell visitors to British Columbia that "the government is racist." He also expressed; "I don't trust any white party" but "the Social Credit party is the enemy of the Indian people." He has promised—or h r e a t e n e d— " We 'll fight every development issue that happens on this coast—logging issues, oil exploration, gas research, anything."

INDIAN WAR CRY

After more than one year of screaming headlines in the province about Indian protests against logging, mining and other industrial development on what they consider their ancestral homeland, this should come as no surprise. However, many Canadians might wonder when open war has been declared now.

The Indians of British Columbia are losing their patience with the provincial government. For more than a century they have petitioned, demanded and requested settlement of their sea and land claims. However, not until December 1985 did the British Columbia Government finally agree to meet with Indian leaders.

When section 35, recognizing aboriginal rights, was included in the Constitutional Act of 1982 the native people saw hope for settlement of their long outstanding In a dispatch written in 1859, Douglas stated:

As friends and allies the native races are capable of rendering the most valuable assistance to the Colony, while their enmity would entail on the settlers a greater amount of wretchedness and physical suffering, and more seriously retard the growth and material development of the Colony ...

Had he had the help he needed in settling land claims then, we would not have the headlines and protests we have today.

Apart from the Saamch and Meares Island protests already mentioned, the most publicized are the Haidas* fight against logging on their ancestral homeland on Lyell and Moresby Island (Queen Charlotte Island), the Lytton and Lillooet bands' protests against logging in the Stein River valley, the Ulkatchos protests against logging claims. Nevertheless, the Indian people felt threatened because the provincial government refused to recognize their claims and continued to give industries—mainly

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logging companies—the go-ahead to continue work on land the native people consider theirs. They fear complete destruction of this land before any sea and land claims can be settled.

Furthermore, Premier Bennett, who often appears to use scare tactics, expressed that settling the land claims would mean to hand over 99 per cent of the province to the Indians.

Newman, from the Brotherhood, denies this by saying: "We know our land is gone forever. What we want is some compensation, a small land base to allow us an economic base." The Kwakiutl District Council puts it: "Our people are not interested in making non-Indian people move off our land or be 'placed on ships and sent back to Europe.' We are willing to share our resources and co-exist..."

The fear of complete destruction of what is considered to be the last stands of unique virgin forests has made many groups of non-Indians join their native brothers.

In their battle for Meares Island the Nuu-cha-nuith succeeded in stopping the giant iViacMillan Bloedel, at least temporarily, until such a time that the Supreme Court can hear their case.

When religious leaders met with the Attorney General of British Columbia, Brian Smith, to urge the government to start negotiations with natives about the land claim issue, Smith's response was, "We believe that the land that they say is subject to aboriginal title has long since become the land of all the people of British Columbia."

The native people's fight for sea and land claims in British Columbia is older than the province itself. Ever since contact-time they have shown 'intruders' that they not only owned the land, but also what grew on it. When Captain Cook (1778) sent men ashore to cut grass for their sheep and goats, he was made to pay for it.

The colonial government in Canada generally did not permit settlement anywhere, unless prior agreement had been made with the aboriginal people. However, this policy was not followed through in British Columbia.

In 1851 Sir James Douglas became Governor of Vancouver Island. He was a strong figure in the history of B.C., and developed the province's first Indian policies.

Realizing that the Indians, who have probably lived on the coast for over 10,000 years, had a feeling for the land, Sir James Douglas tried to make treaties and buy their land. This, of course, was not only out of concern for their welfare, but also to avoid Indian raids on new settlements.

He succeeded in making eight treaties for the areas

around Fort Victoria, as well as a few other areas on Vancouver Island. In these treaties it was agreed that the land itself... becomes the entire property of the white people forever; it is also understood that we are at liberty to hunt over the unoccupied lands, and to carry on our fisheries as formerly."

Today Indians often find themselves in conflict with provincial Game Acts, and most development infringes on their traditional hunting and fishing grounds.

In Saanich the Tsawout band, who has one of the no. 133 year-old treaties, is protesting the building of a marina a few hundred metres from their reservation. Among other things the project includes the building of a 275-metre-long breakwater, transplantation of 31,000 shoots of eelgrass in the bay (eelgrass provides habitat for salmon at one stage in their development), and dredging the bay. The Tsawouts fear this will damage the bay and its marine life.

Lack of funds and sparse settlement made it impossible for Douglas to make agreements with all Indians in the colony. In 1858 he wrote to Sir E. Bulwer Lytton, Secretary of States for the Colonies, on the subject:

I have to enjoin upon you to consider the best and most humane means of dealing with the Native Indians. ...I commit it to you, in the full persuasion that you will pay every regard to the interests of the Natives which an enlightened humanity can suggest....

In 1859 Lord Newcastle, then Secretary of States, wrote to Governor Douglas about his concerns for the native people:

...In the case of the Indians of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, Her Majesty's Government earnestly wish that when the advancing requirements of colonization press upon lands occupied by members of the race, measures of liberality and justice may be adopted for compensating them for the surrender of the territory which they have been taught to regard as their own.

This shows that at this time in the history of British Columbia the Governor and the Imperial government were not only concerned about fair treatment of the Indian people, but also realized that the Indians had ownership to the land.

Throughout the province's history, Douglas seems to have been the only politician in the B.C. government who had any interest in trying to make settlement with the native people. However, the cost of such settlement proved to be beyond the funds of the colonial government.

Several petitions for monies were made. In one of his petitions to the British Government he asked to borrow \$3,000 to extinguish Indian title to the land. Repayment would be made when said land was sold to settlers. In the Chikotin, the Kitwanga's protests against CN's use of their land near Terrace. The Nishgas have for

most of this century been very vocal in their demands for settlement as well as in opposing industrial development on their land.

While most of these protests were taking place Brian Smith expressed, "... unless we had very, very strong indications from the people of British Columbia that they felt that we should negotiate or discuss the matter, I don't see that we can do that." Apparently the provincial government does not consider the groups of Indians as well as the non-Indians who have joined them, is a "strong indication" from the people of B.C.

Perhaps the industry, which is caught in the middle and is suffering losses due to work stoppages when Indians and non-Indians are joining hands, will soon be willing to help pressure the government for a settlement of the land issue.

When Environment Minister Tom McMillan expressed that the federal government is willing to buy out some of Western Forest Products Ltd. 's timber rights in the South Moresby area, to help end confrontations between loggers and natives, former Provincial Forest Minister Tom Waterland's response was that Ottawa should "keep its nose out of a matter that isn't any of their business." This kind of attitude is one of the reasons why the Brotherhood now has declared war on the Socreds.

The B.C. government's attitude changed after Sir Douglas retired. In a report on Indian claim to certain lands, which had been laid out as reserves on Douglas' instruction, Joseph Trutch, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, wrote in 1867:

The Indians have really no right to the lands they claim, nor are they of any actual value or utility to them, and I cannot see why they should either retain these lands to the prejudice of the general interest of the Colony, or to be allowed to make a market of them either to the Government or to Individuals.

There is nothing new about the federal government's concern for the lack of proper settlement of land claims with the Indians in British Columbia. In 1876 the Earl of Dufferin, then Governor-General of Canada, visited the province. During a lengthy speech he said:

... From my first arrival in Canada, I have been very much pre-occupied with the condition of the Indian population in this Province... we must all admit that the condition... is not satisfactory... neglecting to recognize what is known as the Indian title. In Canada this has always been done; no Government, whether provincial or central, has failed to acknowledge that the original title to the land existed in the Indian tribes... The result has been that in Canada our Indians are contented, well affected to the white man, and amenable to the laws and Government....

There is little doubt that the Indians in other parts of Canada will disagree with the latter part of this speech, but at least an effort was made to try to satisfy some of

the Indians' demands, whereas in British Columbia this was, and still is, neglected.

When to this neglect was added prohibition of potlatching and spiritual dancing, carting children off to boarding schools and forbidding them to speak their own language, and topping it off with the present unemployment, which is much higher among the Indian than the non-Indian population, it is a wonder that the native people have had patience not to declare war till now.

The Indians* wish to settle the land issue has not always been there. Gilbert Sproat, an early settler in the Alberni area, was in the 1860's told by a chief: "We do not want the white man, he steals what we have. We wish to live as we are."

The aboriginal people in B.C. have very strong ties to their land, which they feel was given to them by the Creator. When they realized that the settlers would not go away, they pressed for settlement of land claims. This demand became stronger when they arbitrarily were given reserves. The size of these were not only unsatisfactory to the natives, but also to the federal government.

Many committees and commissions have over the past century been formed by the federal government to deal with these issues, and just as many requests and proposals have come from the Indian people. Still there is no settlement or any sign that the B.C. government will take steps towards settlement or even negotiate about land claims.

As more and more British Columbians are becoming worried about the way the forests and other resources are managed, they see settlement of Indian sea and land claims as one way to protect what is still left, from further exploitation.

While the provincial government are trying to ignore a problem that will not go away, the aboriginal people are busy, not only reviving their old spiritual and traditional life, but also gearing up for modern-day negotiations and court battles.

When the Native Brotherhood of B.C. declared war on the Socreds, Newman said there would be instability in B.C. until the provincial government recognized aboriginal rights. In 1959 this was expressed by Reverend Peter Kelly, a Haida, testifying before a joint hearing of the Senate and House of Commons on Indian affairs:

...so long as that title question is not dealt with, every Indian in British Columbia feels that he has been tricked, and he never will be satisfied. I want to say to this committee, in all seriousness, that you will do a good service to the country if you in some way see to it that this is dealt with.