

The CHAIRMAN: It may be rather embarrassing.

Mr. GIBSON: It might be, although I do not think we should look at it in that light. I am asking Mr. MacKay if there is any way in which we can improve the situation, and I believe we should be very glad to have suggestions from him.

The WITNESS: When I entered the service I found that the Indian Commissioner for British Columbia had very little power. Control was centralized in Ottawa, and even in very minor matters it was necessary for the commissioner to secure authority from Ottawa before he could incur even small expenditures. Every time I took a matter up with the then director and the then minister of the department I pointed out that if this system continued there would be no object in having a commissioner in charge of administration in British Columbia, because the agency could have functioned as well as a separate entity without the commissioner. Out of these representations came wider powers for the commissioner in the province. And then I would say this, and I want to be very frank, I have not felt hampered at all in the matter of control from Ottawa. And I will say this, that both Dr. McGill and the present director, and various members of the staff have been most helpful to the administration in British Columbia. They are all a long way away. Sometimes we feel we should like to be closer to the centre of authority. I should say that the matter of extension of authority would depend largely on the confidence the superior officer and the minister concerned is willing to place in an official; if they find that his work is satisfactory, that he can be trusted; then, of course, I would say they would be justified in extending authority.

*By Hon. Mr. Stevenson:*

Q. Do you find that it is necessary, or desirable, that the Indian agent should visit Indians in the outlying districts, their bands and homes?—A. Yes, I think that in order successfully to administer Indian affairs one should become familiar with the Indians in their homes, and with the conditions on the various reserves. That, I think, is the best foundation on which to start. I am ashamed to admit to this committee that there are villages in British Columbia that I have not been able to visit in the ten years that I have been commissioner, due to lack of staff and the ever increasing demand on my time in the office at Vancouver. It is more helpful to one to know from personal knowledge conditions which exist on the reserves, and especially in the individual homes. Such information can never be obtained, of course, through straight office administration. If we had a staff that could meet requirements it would be possible for the commissioner to visit the various reserves with reasonable regularity and to see conditions for himself and decide what should be done to improve them. As things stand at the moment, that is simply impossible.

Mr. MacNICOL: You have no assistant?

The WITNESS: We have an inspector of Indian agencies. Of course, in the absence of the agents in various districts, due to retirement and so on, he is frequently required to act as agent until an appointment is made. The province of British Columbia is a very large territory, the reserves and villages are widely scattered. It takes a long time to visit them. Take for instance the reserves in the Cariboo district, western division, it would be almost impossible to get in there and back in less than ten days.

Hon. Mr. STEVENSON: But when it comes to the appointment of staff, you can use your own discretion; how about Indians being appointed.

The WITNESS: There has never been any restriction with respect to that.