

The WITNESS: I have often heard the declaration that the Indians of British Columbia have been forgotten, and evidence on that should be of some assistance to me in what I have to contribute at this time.

I have not any written submission to make to the committee. If that is required it will be necessary for me to prepare it for you. I am going to give you some information with respect to the administrative setup in the province of British Columbia and the state of the Indians in that part of Canada.

We have some 25,515 Indians in the province of British Columbia, or approximately one-fifth of the Indian population of Canada.

The Indians live in some 170 villages. We have that number of villages in which Indians are resident and in addition numerous communities with scattered habitations. The committee may be interested to know that we have over 12,000 of the Indian population of that province under 17 years of age; almost 50 per cent of the population is 17 years of age or under. We have 1,609 Indian reserves in British Columbia comprising in excess of 829,000 acres or approximately 33 acres per capita. Now for the purposes of administration the province, as I said a moment ago, is divided into 19 agencies, 17 of them under the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the province of British Columbia. Each agency has a small staff comprising an Indian agent, in some cases a field man, and in all cases a stenographer. Perhaps I may observe at this time that one of the weaknesses in the administration there is the lack of staff, particularly in the field division. Anyone who has had experience with Indians knows that it does not do just to advise them what should be done. It is necessary to attend on them constantly, visit them, supervise and assist them. Otherwise their work will be of a haphazard character. The Indians of the province of British Columbia are not far removed from a state of savagery. I recall that it was in 1850 that Sir James Douglas referred to the roving bands of savages being a menace to the straggling white communities. In other words it is not much more than a long lifetime since the Indians of that province were regarded by the white people as in a state of savagery. I think when we endeavour to estimate the progress, or lack of it, that has been made through the years, we should bear that in mind. I doubt very much if any people in the world, with the obstacles that have confronted the Indians of that province, have made greater progress in the same period of time than the Indians in the province of British Columbia have made with all the obstacles to progress in Indian advancement. I would say that one of the obstacles has been that the better elements of white people have sought to ostracize the Indians. That has been a great handicap to begin with. The result is that the Indian is compelled to seek his associations with the poorest element and you find that influence in his life. It creates a little element of problem for the administrator. Another obstacle in the way is that all the governments, apart from the government of Canada, have washed their hands of the Indians pretty well. They do not consider that they have any responsibility whatever with respect to them. They simply say they are wards of the Crown, the dominion, and it is their responsibility and not ours. I think that greater progress could have been made in the years if municipal and provincial governments had accepted some responsibilities, perhaps more responsibility than we have evidence of, in the matter of cooperation for Indian administration with the Dominion of Canada. I said a moment ago that we had over 1,600 reserves in the province of British Columbia. Of these 313 are in what is still known as the railway belt of the province. That is the strip of land twenty miles on either side of the Canadian Pacific Railway which for many years was under the jurisdiction and administration of the dominion government. Some years ago it was transferred to the province of British Columbia.