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Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes, Volume 18, Number 3, Fall 1983, pp. 40-54 (Article)

Published by University of Toronto Press

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# *A Decade of Change: Origins of the Nishga And Tsimshian Land Protests in the 1880s*

E. PALMER PATTERSON II

The decade of the 1880s was one of ferment and change for the Nishga. Internal and external factors operated. The allotment of reserves, the coming of Indian administration, the changing role of the missionary, the conflict within the missionary community — all of these were felt and reacted to by the Nishga. Rivalries between Nishga and Tsimshian and among the Nishga contributed to the sharpened awareness of changes regarding the land. The threat to the land was keenly felt and became *the* public issue. It retained that position for the next one hundred years, with intermittent periods of greater or lesser intensity.

Les années 1880 furent une période de bouleversement pour les Nitkas en raison de facteurs tant intérieurs qu'extérieurs. L'attribution de réserves, l'avènement de la direction indienne, le rôle changeant du missionnaire, le conflit au coeur de la communauté missionnaire, tous ces facteurs influèrent directement sur les Nitkas et leur suscitèrent des réactions. Des rivalités entre les Nitkas et les Tsimshian, ainsi que parmi les Nitkas, aidèrent à aviver la conscience qu'on avait des changements que subissait la terre. Le viol de la terre qui menaçait suscitait une forte réaction et devint par là la question dominante. Il en fut ainsi pendant tout un siècle avec des variations périodiques d'intensité.

**Introduction**

The 1880s in north coastal British Columbia saw the concern about land among the Nishga and Coast Tsimshian peoples crystallize into an intensified protest and a major public issue. Lack of awareness by federal and provincial officials of the existence of these feelings made the protest seem sudden and in large measure the product of outside influences. Provincial and federal officers investigating land claims and the unrest consequent upon them tended to place the blame on white missionary disturbers of the peace. Missionaries were thought to have encouraged the Indians to hold exaggerated notions of their land claims, to resist federal Indian administrators, and to believe that Indian administration would enslave them. Part of the proposed solution was a plan to place strong, able federal officers in the North to give the Indians a new, better, and more optimistic view of what Indian administration would mean, and at the same time bring them under close supervision and firm control. Land Commission investigators C.F. Cornwall and J.P. Planta came to these conclusions; Reserve Commissioner Peter O'Reilly and Provincial Secretary John Robson were generally of the same view, as was Superintendent of Indian Affairs for British Columbia, I.W. Powell.

The land commissioners of 1887 were not entirely in error about missionary influence, but they were incompletely informed; this led them into misleading interpretations and partial understandings of the protest in the 1880s. In fact, the protest continued after the earliest missionaries made their departure. White officialdom thought these Indian views mistaken, sometimes mischievous, and in need of correction. What was not appreciated by Indian Affairs officers, the land commission investigators, the reserve commissioner, and provincial authorities was the extent to which the Nishga and Coastal Tsimshians, at least, had developed



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their land claims and concerns from their own observations and interpretations.

Among the issues which contributed to the land protest were conflicts and rivalries between Nishga of the Nass River and Coastal Tsimshian of Port Simpson and Metlakatla over their rights to fish on the Nass, disputes as to the places they could fish, and Tsimshian claims to land on the Nass for the purpose of fishing. In addition there was disagreement between Nishgas of Lakkalsap and Kincolith over locations of their respective fishing areas, so that competitions and resentments were engendered even on a local level. Other concerns among the Nishga arose from rumours and stories of the displacement of the Songhees from Victoria: these were interpreted as presaging loss of Nishga and Tsimshian land. Along the Nass River, the presence of several white settlers was viewed with suspicion for its future implications. The visits by surveyor W.S. Jemmett and the allotments by reserve commissioner Peter O'Reilly were seen as clear evidence of threatening changes. The economic depression of the mid-1880s closed down the canneries for several years and the late 1880s saw only the slow revival of the industry, undoubtedly adding to misgivings and uneasiness.

**The Historic Background**

The earliest contact of Nishga with Europeans probably occurred in the 1780s. The fishery in the estuary of the Nass River became known to European captains trading for sea-otter by its Tlingit name, Ewen Nass. Each spring thousands of Indians — Nishga, Tsimshian, Haida, Tlingit, and others — gathered to fish, trade, and produce eulachon oil. This location was seen as a good site for a trading post, and in 1831 the Hudson's Bay Company established Port Simpson (also known as Fort Nass) near the mouth of the river. Although the fort was removed after only three years, its presence gave a greater degree of regularity and intensity to Nishga-white contact. Some Nishga built houses at the fort. When the site was relocated on the Tsimshian peninsula it was still close enough for regular contact, positioned as it was about seventy kilometres from the Nass mouth, accessible by canoe, and in territory of the Coast Tsimshian, cultural cousins and trading partners of the Nishga.

To this relocated Port Simpson, visited regularly by Nishga, William Duncan came in 1857. He was a young layman and missionary agent of the Church Missionary Society which, since its founding in 1799 by laymen and clergy of the Church of England, had a worldwide scope for its mission field. Duncan quickly mastered the local language, Coast Tsimshian, and aggressively evangelized among the several tribes who had settled there. In 1862 he decided to remove his converts and prospective converts to another location, away from the undesirable influences of the fort. The new village, Metlakatla, the original home of many of these people, grew quickly and became a phenomenal success, judging by the increase in size, the free choice of the Indians to come and settle there, and the industrial and commercial enterprises commenced and directed by Duncan. He won wide acclaim among missionaries and government authorities for his "genius" and success.

A determined and forceful character, Duncan found his position by the

1880s opposed and criticized by both the church, in the person of a new resident bishop, and the state, the administration of Indian affairs. Various ideological, methodological, and personality factors contributed to a rupture, between Duncan and the Church Missionary Society and then with federal Indian control. Duncan withdrew to Alaska in 1887, taking with him about 80 percent of the people at Metlakatla; its role in missionary affairs on the north coast underwent a dramatic change.

By 1883, missionaries of the Church Missionary Society had evangelized among and converted many of the Nishga villages along the lower Nass, and had established residences in both existing communities and newly-created settlements, of which the most important was Kincolith, established in 1867 under the direction of Robert Tomlinson on the site of the original Port Simpson. Methodist preachers arrived in 1877 at Lakkalsap, also on the lower Nass, but the Church Missionary Society remained the dominant Christian force in the area.

With the decline of Metlakatla, the Nishga and their missionaries became more significant in Church Missionary Society mission activities on the north coast. The Nishga land question which crystallized in the 1880s was followed in the early twentieth century by a new upsurge of land protest. The Nishga Petition of 1913 set them in the forefront of native land protest in British Columbia. This petition was one strand in the organization of Indians to protest the land question, leading to the Special Joint Commission of 1927 which concluded with a powerful but temporary setback. By the early 1970s, the Nishga had not only made the land question their own most important public issue, but had assumed leadership in making it the most important public issue in British Columbia Indian affairs. This essay explores the earliest stirrings of land protest among the Nishga.

**Tension at Metlakatla**

In the 1880s government officers were monitoring the growing tension at Metlakatla: the dispute between William Duncan and the Bishop of Caledonia, William Ridley (who arrived in 1878), was believed by Superintendent Powell to be the root cause of the troubles there. According to this view, the rivalry between these two had escalated into a "considerable excitement" and "anxiety for fear of more serious consequences." The key to Duncan's strength lay in the economic advantages his imagination, skills, and leadership had brought in the form of employment.

After the breach between Duncan and the Church Missionary Society, his followers removed the goods from the buildings on the Society's two acres at Metlakatla, dismantled ["tore down"] buildings, and re-erected them on other land. When the Church Missionary Society turned the school building into their church, Duncan's adherents attempted to pull down that building also. The majority wanted to have only one church, which called itself the Christian Church of Metlakatla, and to discard Anglican forms of worship. This was an evangelical Christianity based solely on the Bible but under Duncan's guidance and leadership. The community wished to be governed by the native Council of the village



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and the laws of the Queen of England. The religious schism caused "serious troubles," "religious rancour," and "infinite damage" in surrounding communities as well. In October 1883 Powell hoped that the Church Missionary Society, as the minority (10 percent, he thought), would withdraw to another site. The people then would come under the Indian Act and proper federal administration, thereby ending the troubles.[1]

On 30 October 1884, Indian Agent and Stipendiary Magistrate A.C. Elliott warned the Provincial Secretary that a dangerous situation existed at Metlakatla and bloodshed was threatening. A riot had already occurred there. The larger danger was that violence would spread along the entire coast owing to the teaching of Duncan and Tomlinson. Elliott based his opinions on personal observation, interviews with others, and remarks made to him by Duncan. "Mr. Duncan, in a kind of frenzy, told me that his people, sooner than give up their claims, would burn their village and leave, and that the Indians along the coast would follow their example," taking their cue from Metlakatla.[2]

A week later Duncan told Elliott the Indians had been grievously wronged and asked for an investigating commission. Elliott failed to see what the grievances were. A letter from David Leask (a Tsimshian protege of Duncan) on behalf of the Metlakatla people rejected the authority of Elliott, saying he was not recognized by them.[3] This brought a strong reply from Provincial Secretary John Robson. Robson informed Leask and the others that no part of the population, advanced or otherwise, could refuse constituted authority. All people are under the Queen's law, and no Tsimshian or Indian law or village council had greater authority, Robson wrote. Chiding the missionaries for not teaching this, he concluded: "the sooner you dismiss from your minds all idea of setting up what you are pleased to term your 'own law,' and submit to...the Queen's law the better it will be...further, I would warn you that those who teach you to set yourselves above and against the Queen's law are not acting the part of good teacher or your true friends."[4]

William Duncan saw the province as the provocateur. In a letter to Lawrence Van Koughnet, deputy minister of Indian Affairs, he said that Indians regarded the province as "acting unlawfully" and "in disregard of Imperial edicts." The situation threatened to break into violence and the provincial government was not afraid "to provoke hostilities so long as the Dominion Government are between them and the Indians."[5]

The situation at Metlakatla, in Powell's opinion, worsened. Contempt of law spread to the surrounding tribes. The appointment of an agent had not brought about respect for or obedience to the law and he was not able to function as intended. Since administration of justice was a provincial responsibility, that government should be summoned in the form of local police. The spread of "insubordination" to nearby communities resulted in "settlers," i.e. whites, making appeals to the province for security of life and property. The Indians attempted to take the law into their own hands, but this was attributable to "dangerous advice" from unnamed advisers. These persons were "solely respon-

sible for their present unfortunate position."[6]

Powell attributed the Tshimshian dissatisfaction with their reserve allotments to "mischievous advice of those whose personal interests induce them...to prevent officers of the Government" from taking over Indian administration of the villages. The appointment of a magistrate at Metlakatla would, he thought, be "beneficial" in bringing law and order.

Powell believed that the Indian Advancement Act, passed in 1884, was a viable mechanism for dealing with the unrest on the northwest coast, if the Tsimshian Indians could be led to accept it by their missionary advisers. However, monetary considerations and prestige might make the missionaries resistant to the federal government's "system of municipal organization."[7] To arbitrate the dispute and to investigate the state and condition of the Indians a commission was appointed in 1887.

**The Northwest Coast Commission of 1887**

The impetus to form the Northwest Coast Commission came directly from two sets of interviews held between government officials (both provincial and federal) and the Indians in February 1887. In response to an Indian petition expressing concern over the land, the first meeting on 3 February was arranged to hear the views of the Nishga and Port Simpson delegates; the second, on 8 February, was with Nishga only.

The meetings had an inauspicious beginning. Government officials rejected the services of Reverend Thomas Crosby, a Methodist missionary, as interpreter. Obviously, they feared a clergy-induced distortion of native opinions. A Nass man, Charles Burton, was more or less commandeered into interpreting for both Nishga and Coast Tsimshian, although he protested his unwillingness to do so.

At the first interview, the Nishga were represented both by Charles Burton and by John Wesley [Mountain] of Kincolith, the son of Chief Mountain of Lakkalsap/Greenville, who had recently become an Anglican and moved to Kincolith. Two delegates at the interview with Nishga on 8 February were Matthew Naas (Lakkalsap/Greenville) and Arthur Gurney (Kincolith). Naas and Gurney especially emphasized that they spoke for the chiefs and that the government should send representatives to them. Naas began, "We have brought the words of the chiefs to lay before you," and Gurney opened with "We have been sent by the chiefs, who are wishing and hoping for the one thing...our lands."[8]

Both interviews showed Indian concern over loss of land (the rumours of Songhees losses seemed ominous), fear of loss of freedom ("bondage," "slaves") under federal Indian administration, and a desire for a treaty. The Indians reassured the officials that their intentions were peaceful. Port Simpson delegate Richard Wilson told of his people's concern about the location of reserves: they had had no information about O'Reilly's reserve allotments, he stated. Burton enumerated the various white individuals and companies who had pre-empted land on the Nass River, in Port Simpson, and in the Skeena mouth areas. In summarizing several of these concerns, Burton stated: "...but the way we are fixed now we don't know the land is ours, and have not got anything to show — that



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it is. We are not free on the land...we are liable to be removed...the way things are now."[9] He added that Indians had proved their abilities and ought to be as free as whites.

Several days later, Arthur Gurney (of Kincolith) reiterated that the people "feel in bondage" rather than free upon the land: they wanted a treaty. The Nishga were in his words "getting civilized," whereas previously they did not know that the government held the land. They had not understood the significance of O'Reilly's and Jemmett's work at first. "We did not know how much land was being given to us; and when it was surveyed we saw that it was very small...."[10] Now they were making explicit their demands for land on Alice Arm, Hasting Arm, Portland Inlet, and Observatory Inlet. In addition, the Nishga requested cedar-wood for packing crates to ship fish each spring at the eulachon fishing season.

O'Reilly resisted the inclination of the other members of the committee, including Powell, to give much additional land to the Nishga. He denied vigorously that only a few people had been present when he took the information on which his allotments were made. Nevertheless it was agreed that the number of reserves would be increased and other adjustments made about existing reserves. The committee also agreed to send a joint federal-provincial commission to the north coast to investigate Indian land concerns. O'Reilly promised to return in the summer (1887) to make adjustments. Burton concluded his remarks at the second interview by promising to tell the Indians that government officials were not wicked men as reported to them by some people.

In October 1887, Commissioners Clement F. Cornwall and Joseph P. Planta, representing the two governments, went to the Nass and heard from representatives of Kincolith, Greenville, and Gitwinsilth. Present on 17 October at Kincolith were a number of prominent or "principal" men including George Kinsada, Adam Kishni, Moses [Bailey], Paul Kledach, and Samuel Seymour. Frederick Allen and Arthur Gurney acted as speakers for this group. Chiefs Kinsada, Kishni, and Seymour gave brief welcoming remarks and then listened while their spokesmen presented their testimony. On the next day, at Nass Harbour, people from Greenville, Gitix, Gitwinsilth, and a fourth, unnamed village (probably Quinwoch/Ankida) were present. All of them were identified as chiefs: from Greenville were Mountain, David McKay, Charles Rush, Kledach, Matthew Naas, Job Calder (Nouse), representing his extremely eminent wife Victoria Long-Arm, and Arthur Calder; from Gitix were Neas Youse and Tallahat; from Gitwinsilth were Sabassah and Hawillah; and from the fourth village were Tatguagaas, Kledach, Neeishlesyarn, Laik, Kitchon, Waalsh, and Nishchan. Probably most of these men, like those from Kincolith, held titles of the Wolf or Eagle crests. Many of these chiefs gave their own testimony.

Near the end of the interview on 18 October, an old, blind man, Neispuck, sprang up and declared, "I am the oldest man here, and can't sit still any longer and hear that it is not our fathers' land. Who is the chief that gave this land to the Queen? Give us his name. We have never heard it."[11]

Testimony gathered by the Commissioners revealed a series of concerns over land. These had their origins partly in the Indians' own rivalries over land use, and partly in a perceived threat to their use of land from government action, that is, surveying and reserve allotment. From the testimony, coupled with contemporary documents, a picture of developing native concerns over land emerges. These can be divided into three areas: missionary interests, Indian interests versus Indian interests, and Indian interests versus white intrusion.

**Missionary Interests**

Missionaries linked the Christian village and Indian issues, including their land concerns. In this way, village, church, and land became aspects of missionary activity, along with concern for Christianization, "civilization," peaceful acceptance of new forms of government, and federal Indian administration. These considerations often put the missionary in a strong position to resist or aid the purposes and activities of the federal government. The strong Nishga response to the land question was enhanced by the aid and advice supplied by the missionary. The most outstanding example of this advice on the political level is that of W.H. Collison. On the plane of cultural accommodation the work of James B. McCullagh complements that of Collison.

The Christian colony system, which the Anglicans first used at Metlakatla (1862) under William Duncan's leadership, underwent some subtle but significant changes regarding the land by the late 1880s. Duncan received a two-acre grant from Governor James Douglas for the site of Metlakatla. Robert Tomlinson tried, but failed to get a similar grant in 1867 at Kincolith. However, by the time of Collison's incumbency at Kincolith (1884) and McCullagh's at Aiyansh (1883), important changes had taken place. The administration of Indian affairs had come under federal control. The Indian Act had been passed. The allocation of specific reserve land was taking place. The government's goal of a peaceful evolution of the Nishga to assimilation became closely linked to the creation of reserves and Indian acceptance of land settlements. The missionaries recognized the Indian complaints even though they did not necessarily accept or agree with the most sweeping Indian claims to all land. The missionaries believed that without a peaceful resolution of the land claims which was satisfactory to the Indians, the purposes of evangelization and Indian administration would be frustrated, overturned, and brought to nothing.

Events in the dispute which arose between William Duncan and William Ridley had contributed to native concern over land. At Metlakatla, the plot of land which Governor James Douglas had, at Duncan's request, granted to the Church Missionary Society became one of the elements in the land protest. Duncan and his followers claimed that the land belonged to the Indians, while the Society claimed the land as legally theirs, Duncan having been their agent when the grant was given. Duncan's rupture with the Church Missionary Society and the attendant controversy over that step included a debate over who owned the two acres, and called attention to the threat of loss of Indian land generally.



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The Nishga became concerned over their land as they saw the dispute taking place among Tsimshian at Metlakatla where they had friends and acquaintances. Robert Tomlinson, missionary at Kincolith from 1867 to 1877, maintained his contacts there even though he had moved to a new mission field on the upper Skeena. He visited the Nishga regularly and encouraged them to support the Metlakatla faction loyal to Duncan. He also encouraged the removal of buildings built during his incumbency at Kincolith and was said to be urging people to leave the Nishga Christian village.

Tomlinson was also engaged in a dispute with Powell whom he accused of deliberate misrepresentation and a "bitter spirit." Powell had complained to Bishop Ridley that the missionary interfered with Indian administration's efforts to vaccinate Indians. Tomlinson, in a letter to Sir John A. Macdonald, threatened a libel suit against Powell and asked that Joseph Trutch be appointed to investigate the matter.[12]

In early 1884 Tomlinson warned of the dangers which might result from a failure to settle satisfactorily Indian claims on the upper Skeena.[13] In October he again wrote of the unrest and dangers because of friction between Indians and whites. The unrest was aggravated, he thought, by concern over the closure of the canneries, which would result in increased dependency on hunting, fishing, and gathering, and greater competition for these resources. Anxiety would make the upper Skeena people more detemined than ever to resist a perceived threat to their rights.

On the basis of his experiences with Green and Tomlinson, Powell denounced unnamed missionaries who advised Indians to resist government. An Indian Agent should be appointed to suppress illegal councils not authorized by Indian Affairs but presided over and guided by missionaries. Missionaries who advised resistance to federal Indian administration should be excluded from reserves. He noted that the Nishga were having land troubles among themselves.[14]

**Indian Interests versus Indian Interests**

The Nishga concern for their land and land rights grew from deep roots in the traditional fishing practises along the lower Nass River. The word Nass derives from a name meaning "food depot" given to the river mouth by the Tlingit. There each spring the fish runs were abundant and these resources were exploited by both Nishga and Coastal Tsimshian. Disputes had arisen in historical times, including an incident in 1869, in which Governor Seymour himself sailed to the area on H.M.S. *Sparrowhawk*, and Tomlinson and Duncan acted as aides to arbitration between Nishga and Tsimshian.

When, in the 1880s, O'Reilly and Jemmett came to the Nass to decide where the reserves should be and to run survey lines for them, a danger to land rights was perceived. The Nishga feared that lands which were aboriginally theirs might be taken from them. These plots of land on the Nass might be assigned to the Tsimshian, or Tsimshian traditional use might be fixed and expanded by government decision. The Tsimshian for their part feared that allotment to the Nishga

of the areas in the Nass necessary for Tsimshian fishing needs might close them out of their customary spring fishing. Port Simpson Tsimshian were said to be building houses on the Nass reserves above their permitted fishing frontage and claiming the "whole place." By occupying the areas behind the frontage ("front chain"), they prevented Kincolith gardeners from harvesting their potatoes or planting more.[15] In the end, the Kincolith Indians were given land, but the Port Simpson Tsimshian were given permission to fish at certain points and the use of frontage land only.

In addition to these conflicts with Coastal Tsimshian, Kincolith and Greenville (Lakkalsap) Nishga had friction between themselves over the use and allocation of fishing areas. Greenville people thought the Kincolith settlers were using their relocation (in 1867) from upriver to downriver in order to increase their fishing advantage. The Kincoliths wished to establish their land rights at the eulachon fisheries firmly, at four sites. They called attention to the buildings constructed at one of these, Stoney Point, and to gardens they made at all four. They objected to any commonage being given to others. The Greenvilles urged the Kincoliths to give up certain fishing places near Greenville, which had been theirs before the Kincoliths relocated from Quinwoch/Ankida. The Kincolith settlers argued that they still had rights at their earlier site near Greenville, and this site was still needed because so many Nishga and Tsimshian fished on the river. Greenvilles demanded exclusive use of Stoney Point, while Kincoliths argued their claims to locations on the basis that these were the traditional lands of certain Kincolith Chiefs. Dissatisfied with the reserve allotments made by O'Reilly, they recalled their disputes with both Port Simpson and Metlakatla people over fishing rights at Stoney Point. Greenville leaders pointed out that they did not realize that they were going to get less land than they needed at the time O'Reilly made the reserve land allotments. They told the Commissioners (in 1887) that their senior chieftainess, Victoria Long-Arm, had told them to protest: "...our land is small. It is not large. It is not as much as we can use. We can't live on it. It is not what we asked for, not so large as we expected."[16]

W.H. Collison, writing of these contentions many years later, remembered the disagreements between Kincolith and Greenville; he also recalled the solution offered. About 1881 the Kincoliths recommended to Indian Reserve Commissioner Peter O'Reilly that the land in the fishing area be divided between Kincolith and Greenville (Lakkalsap), and this was done. Reserves were created behind the front chain above the high water mark. The front chain was made a commonage available to all Indians for fishing. Port Simpson Tsimshian, Kitkatlas and others were to fish on the front chain commonage at Red Cliff reserve (#13) and upper Nass Nishga at Stoney Point reserve (#10).[17] The Commission report shows that Black Point (#11) and Canaan (#12) were also created with front chain commonage at the same time.

Indians at Port Simpson blamed O'Reilly for the antagonism between themselves and Nass Indians. He, they charged, had failed to inform them that he was allotting reserves on the Nass where, they asserted, they had fished for genera-



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tions. He "started all trouble on the Nass between us and the Kincolith people by saying he had given us only one claim for our fishing ground. These people have just a few years ago moved down to the mouth of the River (Kincolith) and we do not see why they should wish now to plant our fishing grounds that we have held so long." The fishing grounds belonged to them and the Kincolith people had no right to it. O'Reilly, they charged, had not granted their claims on the Nass, so they would not allow their land at Port Simpson to be surveyed.[18]

The view of the government officers, federal and provincial, was that the Nishga and Tsimshian could not, on their own and from their own information, intelligence, and cultural background, conceive the idea that their land was threatened and that the threat should be resisted. The Indians were not believed to have any concepts of land-holding which could result in a sense of usurpation of their tenure. Despite this view of Indian land tenure, Cornwall and Planta anticipated that the Indians might claim an Indian title. To prevent the influence of outside agitators, missionaries were not allowed to act as advocates, and though they were permitted as interpreters, even this was inexpedient unless they were indispensible. Indians were told to communicate directly with Cornwall and Planta and not through clergy of any denomination. The direct testimony of the Indians to the Commissioners showed anxiety and concern over possible loss of land. It also presented their denial that the land had passed from their ownership.

Not satisfied that they had made their position clear, chiefs of Greenville, Gitwinsilth, and others wrote to Cornwall and Planta a few days after their interview to clarify it further. Their "hearts" were "not satisfied" with their own response when the land issue was raised. Planta had stated that the Queen, not the Nishga, owned the land. They could not "receive" this "into" their "hearts": the land had been given to their forefathers by God. It was handed down to them and they had never given it to anyone. Therefore it was still theirs and would be, until they signed it away by treaty ("Strong paper"). The situation, they hinted, might become violent: "we shall pray to our God to give you great wisdom, and guide us all that we may find peace." Eleven chiefs signed this letter, including several prominent Methodist Nishga leaders.[19]

**Indian Interests Versus White Intrusion**

Nishga land concerns were heightened when threats of white encroachment began to appear. Bishop Ridley informed the Church Missionary Society in London, September 1886, that the Tsimshian had observed the treatment of the Songhees (Songish) in Victoria. Noting that the Songhees were given a reserve and then "driven" from it, the Tsimshian feared the same thing would happen to them. Ridley reported that Duncan had not only encouraged them in this view, but had declared that because the Church Missionary Society adherents were the only Indians who worked for the land surveyors, they had "betrayed" their own people.[20]

Evidence of land concern prior to the 1880s was furnished by Reverend Alfred O. Green, Methodist missionary at Greenville (1877-90). In replying to

charges that missionaries had stirred up the Indians on the issue of land, he noted that when he arrived at Lakkalsap in 1877 there was concern in the village about possible loss of land to whites, missionaries, or others. A handful of whites had penetrated into the Nass Valley (c. 1878-79) and had taken up land under provincial grants including the establishment of a cannery. Several Kincolith Indians who had dwellings at the Fishery were pressured to remove by whites. The majority of the houses at that site were owned by Kincolith people, including Chiefs George Kinsada and Robert Qwockshow. Some of the Nishga worked for Croasdaile's cannery at Fishery Bay. The presence of white settlers and land holders along the Nass was vivid illustration of the possible further loss of land.

Green wrote Powell in early 1886 asserting that Indian land claims on the Nass had never been settled. He called attention to thirty-five acres adjoining Lakkalsap held by James Grey. Grey had purchased the land from the province and the Lakkalsap people objected to his holding it. Green also called attention to ten acres at Fishery Bay, a narrow strip running along the river, sold to J.J. Robertson by a previous white proprietor. Green complained to Ottawa of business links between Powell and Robertson. Tomlinson too had corresponded with Ottawa about business between Powell and H.E. Croasdaile, owner of a cannery on the land in question. Powell had invested money and received a lien on the building and equipment. Croasdaile later failed, and Powell eventually lost $20,000. Green was himself reported by Powell to have taken over the property by 1886. Powell accused Green of engaging in a profitable trading business, calling this the basis of his hostility to all other traders and to government officers who called attention to his sideline in trading. In this feud between Indian administrator and missionary, accusations and insults were freely exchanged.

Powell denounced Green and Crosby — both Methodists — to Ottawa. He asserted that, under cover of being clergy and permitted by government, Crosby and Green used their position "to direct the illegal councils of their charges, and otherwise to poison their minds."

> With a view of increasing their influence among Indians, both he and his colleague Mr. Crosby have endeavoured to invest them [the Indians] with powers they do not and cannot possess...and create antipathy against the proper authorities and thus breed disloyalty and ill feeling. In any other portion of this Province there is not the slightest trouble with the Indians, nor to my knowledge have any vexatious questions arisen in their minds as to their aboriginal rights to the whole country, except where they have in the first instance been fomented and agitated by these teachings.[21]

A third holding on the Nass was that of John Matthieson. He acquired 320 acres in April 1879, erecting three buildings on the land and cultivating several acres. His success in growing vegetables was commented upon as an indication of the Nass Valley potential for agriculture. Matthieson agreed to give up his holding so that it could be added to Nishga reserves but asked for twice the amount O'Reilly offered him in compensation.[22]



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**The Indian Advancement Act**

The coming of Indian administration in the 1880s increased fears about land, as has already been noted in the case of reserve allotments. Some missionaries opposed the new federal Indian administration as they believed that the Indians were beyond the need for federal administration and the Indian Act. Imposition of Indian administration weakened the position of the missionaries and was perceived as threatening the status of those Indians who cooperated with the missionaries by forming the leadership of local village councils created, guided, or advised by them. In some cases social advancement had been possible under the mission regime to persons not of the high status in traditional society. Duncan had clashed with chiefs at Metlakatla, and most ranking chiefs of the Port Simpson Indians had not been among his adherents. But Anglican and Methodist missionaries at Kincolith, Lakkalsap, and Aiyansh on the Nass had been very conscious of the support of the chiefs and status people.

Duncan and Tomlinson, seceders from the Church Missionary Society and Metlakatla by 1887, and Crosby and Green, the Methodist missionaries, were accused by the Cornwall-Planta commission of giving bad advice and stirring up the people. It was these men who were creating discontent, apprehension, and unrest by their irresponsible behaviour and statements which were unwarranted, artificial, and contrary to the interests of the Indians, whites, missions, and government. Green and Crosby vehemently denied these allegations. They outlined their activities to promote peace and order, and Methodist Indians corroborated them. The missionaries emphasized their collaboration with government, as in the Skeena troubles, and pointed out that concern over threats to the land pre-dated the controversies of the 1880s.

The commissioners reported that the Kincoliths and Metlakatlans, after Duncan's departure, were not asking for treaties, annuities, and reserves. They were willing to come under the Indian Act and Indian administration, and to accept an Indian agent. The Commissioners believed the northern coastal Indians had been without federal control and left to their missionaries' influence too long. Denominational differences had caused problems according to this view. The Indians, the Commission found, thought they knew what was best for themselves. These conditions needed to be changed. Federal control was particularly important in order to develop properly the area's economic potential. Since white settlers were not coming into the area, prosperous and well-controlled Indian communities were a necessity.[23]

Nishga testimony indicates that they had the impression that government control meant a loss of freedom. They feared that under the Indian Act they would become slaves. This was a serious matter, especially to the status-conscious Nishga community leaders for whom slavery had specific and vivid connotations in their aboriginal culture. I.W. Powell was especially eager that Indians of Kincolith would cooperate with government and he hoped and expected that their missionary/pastor, W.H. Collison, would be able to influence them in this direction.

In this desire missionary, chiefs, and Indian administrator reached a point of accord.

Frederick Allen (Tackonits), Nishga teacher at Kincolith and spokesman for the chiefs at Kincolith, told the Commissioners: "Some of the missionaries frighten their Indians, telling them that an agent is a horrible thing, and that he would oppress them in everything, and the Indians believe him and that is what causes the trouble. We, the Kincoliths, don't believe it, because our teachers have not told us so."[24] In 1888, Kincoliths, under the influence of Collison and the Nishga leaders, came under the Indian Advancement Act (1884) and began to pass by-laws regulating some aspects of village life. By this step, they elected a chief councillor and band council. The Kincoliths received high praise from government: "These Kincolith Indians are among the most civilized of the Indians in British Columbia...."[25]

Anglican missionary W.H. Collison's adaptive strategy at Kincolith offered an alternative to emigration and the sense of entrapment. It was not a threat of a diminution, but a way out of confrontation and toward a better condition. Perhaps this explains why Collison's absence from Kincolith in the late 1880s was so vigorously complained of and why traditional chiefs cooperated in the new experiment in village government installed at Kincolith in 1888 under the Indian Advancement Act. By accepting the Indian Advancement Act, Kincolith put itself in an advantageous position as regards its new relations with Indian administration and with its Nishga and Tsimshian neighbours. In the early 1890s the Aiyansh Nishga also came under the Indian Advancement Act.

**Conclusion**

The concern and debate over land in the 1880s illustrate the changes which were taking place and ways in which native choice of action was being reduced and narrowed by the growing power of state, church, and industry. In the 1880s federal Indian administration was established among the Tsimshian and Nishga; Church authority was being regularized and the individualism of the pioneer missionary was being challenged by the increased presence of Church authority, in the form of the bishop, priests, and an expansion of personnel. Some staff had additional church ties through previous contacts in England and elsewhere. Missionaries were coming out as ordained priests and as university men. The late nineteenth-century expansion of missions was reaching the north coast of British Columbia. State and church cooperated to bring about what was intended to be a new era of law and order, civilization and Christianity. The changed conditions were underscored by the fact that the Metlakatla majority (the supporters of Duncan) left, not the minority loyal to the bishop. Duncan and his adherents emigrated to Alaska in 1887, leaving the remnant as adherents to the Church of England. The outside world was impinging on the Christian colony system and the two choices available were adaption or a retreat to a new remoteness to perserve the earlier conditions. Duncan chose the latter, seeing himself and his followers as persecuted and harassed by state and church.



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The coming of Indian administration — reserves, Indian agents, the potlatch law — in the 1880s was felt in various parts of the province and knowledge of conditions spread from area to area. These changes spelled restrictions and restraints, and apprehensions grew. Allotment of reserves forcefully illustrated the threat to Indian land. The protest of the 1880s was against the loss of land and freedom: previously, the Indians had possessed both. Some missionaries assisted them in articulating — in several ways — their response, but the Nishga and Tsimshian had perceived the threat of foreign encroachment without the need for "agitators."

When, in the early twentieth century, a new upsurge of land protest came to public attention, the old explanation was again invoked: outside agitators were said to be stirring up the Indians. The new ringleader was Arthur E. O'Meara. His accomplices included a society which called itself the Friends of the Indians. Once again there was some validity to assigning these figures a part, but as in the 1880s the Indian initiative in the protest was miscalculated and underestimated by government. Insults to the implicated missionaries did not in fact silence Indian protest. Rather, it caused Indians to look to their own resources for action as the century progressed.[26]

NOTES

1. Canada, House of Commons, Sessional Papers No. 4, 1884. Annual Report of Dept. of Indian Affairs, pp. 105-6. I. W. Powell to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Oct. 31, 1883. (Hereafter cited as Sessional Papers.)
2. Victoria, B.C. Return to an order of the Legislative Assembly for all correspondence relating to the recent Indian troubles on the North-West, p. 287, Feb. 1887. Several other letters (Sept. 1884) show whites on Skeena feared a violent outbreak there. (Hereafter cited as Return To...)
3. *Ibid.*, p. 290, 22 November 1884.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 290-91, 28 January 1885.
5. Public Archives of Canada (P.A.C.), Indian Affairs, Black Series, RG 10, Vol. 3605, Letter 20 July 1885.
6. Sessional Papers No. 3, 1885. Annual Report of Department of Indian Affairs, p. 117. I. W. Powell Report.
7. *Ibid.*
8. British Columbia. Report of Conferences between the Provincial Government and Indian Delegates from Port Simpson and Nass River, 3rd and 8th February 1887, pp. 264-65.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
11. Report of Commission on North West Coast Indians, 1888. Papers, p. 434. (Hereafter cited as N.W.C. Comm.)
12. P.A.C. *op. cit.*, Vol. 3620. Robert Tomlinson to John A. Macdonald, 26 April 1882.
13. Return to..., pp. 277-78. Robert Tomlinson to Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, 27 February 1884, p. 279; John Robson, Provincial Secretary to Robert Tomlinson, 29 February 1884.
14. P.A.C. *op. cit.*, Vol. 3605. I. W. Powell to John A. Macdonald, 23 April 1885.
15. *Ibid.*, W.S. Jemmett to I. W. Powell, 11 June 1886.
16. N.W.C. Comm. Papers, p. 430.
17. W. H. Collison, "The History and particulars of the 'Stoney Point' or Fishery Bay reserve etc.," n.d. Glenbow Archives, File No. M 251. Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta.
18. P.A.C., *op. cit.*, Vol. 3605. Paul Scowgite and David Swanson to W. S. Jemmett, 29 May 1886.
19. N.W.C. Comm. Papers, pp. 461-62.
20. Church Missionary Society Records. Ridley to C.M.S., 5 Sept. 1886. Microfilm, Reel A123.

21. P.A.C., *op. cit.*, Vol. 3739. I. W. Powell to John A. Macdonald, 7 May 1885.
22. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3659. Report by Peter O'Reilly, 25 March 1882.
23. N.W.C. Comm. Papers, pp. 422, 424-25.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 443.
25. Sessional Papers No. 16, 1889, pp. 201-2.
26. For students who would like to explore the history of the land claims, two particular references will be found useful as a starting place: Edwin Peter May, "The Nishga Land Claim, 1873-1973," M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1979; and Douglas Sanders, "The Nishga Case," *B.C. Studies* (Autumn 1973), pp. 3-20.

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