

Iroquois Indian Chief in Geneva Colorful Figure

The dominion government's problem of dealing with the original inhabitants of the country, the various tribes of Indians that stretched from coast to coast, has always been a ticklish one. Now it has become an international affair with the visit of Chief Deskaheh, of the Six Nations Indians, to the League of Nations at Geneva, as described in dispatches in Saturday's Herald.

Deskaheh is a speaker of the council of the Six Nations Indians, known as the Iroquois, along the Grande river near Brantford in Ontario. Representing a certain section of the 4,000 Indians who live on the reserve he is now petitioning the League of Nations to take up their cause against the Canadian government in their claim that they are not British subjects, but allies of the British king.

Deskaheh is a colorful figure, one that would command attention everywhere. Even old-world Geneva is finding him a figure of romance, as he strides through the streets in the full war regalia of a chief of the Iroquois. Whether the admission of his claims by the Canadian government, would be for the good of the Red man throughout the Dominion is a question, but there is no doubt that the Six Nations chief is sincere in his fight for what he thinks is right.

Briefly, what Deskaheh says, is that the Six Nations Indians are not subjects of Canada, they are not bound by Canadian laws. Canadian law officers have no jurisdiction within their territories and have no control over their conduct. Under an ancient treaty, executed a hundred and fifty years ago by Governor Haldimand, he says, they are allies of the British king, and as such must be approached as autonomous people, even in the same manner as the Canadian government would approach the government of the United States.

Under the leadership of Deskaheh whose English name is Levi General, and Chief Dave Hill, secretary of the Six Nations Council, there was threat a year and a half ago that the Six Nations Indians would take the warpath and that the war cry of the Iroquois would once more be raised. Orders of Ontario courts against Indians from the reserve went unheeded and police officers were forcibly ejected from the reserve by Indians who resented any encroachment on their territory.

But last winter a detachment of Canadian Mounted Police was stationed at Ohaweken, the seat of the council house of the Six Nations and the sight of the redcoats quieted threats of violence. Now Deskaheh has abandoned thoughts of violence and pins his hopes on the League of Nations.

A few years ago Deskaheh made a pilgrimage to London, England to lay his woes at the 'foot of the throne,' but was referred by the English authorities to present his troubles to the Canadian government. This the Indians refuse to do, saying that they can get no redress. As a final resort, Deskaheh says that he and his followers will repudiate the treaty which made them the allies of Britain, will leave their ancient lands along the Grand river, and will return to the United States, from which country they came a hundred and fifty years ago.