

Section 17.—The Indians and Eskimos of Canada

The Indians.*—The Indians of Canada are not one race, but are divided into a number of basic linguistic stocks or language groups which are, in turn, subdivided into tribal groups with many local dialects. There are ten linguistic groups, of which four are found east of the Rocky Mountains—Algonkian, Athapaskan, Iroquoian and Siouan—and six are found west of the Rockies—Kootenayan, Salishan, Wakashan, Tsimshian, Haida and Tlinkit. They are subdivided further into many tribes with widely differing physical and psychological characteristics and cultures. The Indians of Algonkian stock are the most numerous. They are scattered throughout the area from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rocky Mountains and include such tribes as the Miemacs of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the Montagnais of Quebec, and the Ojibwas, Crees and Blackfeet. Iroquoian stock, including the Hurons, are found mainly in Ontario and Quebec. Athapaskan stock inhabit the Northwest and Yukon Territories, while tribes of Sioux are located in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

In all there are more than 136,000 Indians in Canada, divided into about 600 bands. Reserves, or lands set aside for the use of these Indian bands, number more than 2,000, varying in size from a few acres to 500 sq. miles.

The Indians have long been regarded as a separate and special responsibility of the Government and their administration is now under the jurisdiction of the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, except for medical and health services which are provided by the Department of National Health and Welfare. The primary function of Indian administration has always been to conduct Indian affairs in such a manner as to enable them to become increasingly self-supporting and independent. The legislation in effect up to September 1951 covered management of Indian lands and reserves, trust funds, welfare projects, relief, family allowances, education, descent of property, rehabilitation of Indian veterans on reserves, Indian treaty obligations, enfranchisement of Indians and a variety of other matters. A complete examination of Indian affairs was conducted by a special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons during the Parliamentary Sessions of 1946, 1947 and 1948, and, as a result, the previous legislation under which Indian affairs were administered was repealed and a new Act (15 Geo. VI, c. 29) brought into force on Sept. 4, 1951. This constituted the first complete revision of Indian legislation since 1880.

The New Indian Act.—The new Act is designed to bring the Indians, by progressive steps, into a position of social, political and economic equality with other Canadians by giving them greater powers over their own lands and funds and by decreasing the powers held by the Government.

Under the old Act, for instance, the Crown could grant timber-cutting rights on Indian reserves and lease unused lands without the consent of the Indian owners. Such transactions now require the approval of the band concerned. Similarly,

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