

James I. Coffey's Perfidy to the Chippewa Indians and his Mendacious Attacks upon the Legislative Committee in Washington Endeavoring to Secure Relief to the Chippewas

From the Oppressive Persecution of the Indian Bureau, and to Recover for them Their Property Unlawfully Confiscated or Maladministered by the Indian Bureau Officials.

Washington, D. C., Jan. 28th 1918—James I. Coffey is again playing the roll of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. This time he is in Washington posing as the friend and representative of the Chippewa Indians and at the same time using all his influence to prevent legislation being urged by the Legislative Committee that would turn over to the Chippewa Indians their money and land and relieve them of further departmental supervision that has been so oppressively exercised in the past. He has become one of the agents of the Indian Bureau and is being used as a tool by those persons who want to hold the Chippewa Indians in a state of abject bondage. He is opposing the efforts of the General Council and its officers in their endeavor to secure the payment of the moneys improperly being held in trust by the Indian Bureau and belonging to the Chippewa Indians. These moneys are being held on the pretext that the Chippewa Indians are incompetent to handle their funds. He is opposing the issuance of patents in fee simple to the Chippewa Indians which would remove the restrictions upon their lands and enable them to manage their property as other citizens of the United States manage theirs. He is opposing the Chippewa Indians in their efforts to recover from the United States for the large tracts of land and timber that have been illegally taken from them by the United States in violation of their treaties and agreements and for which the Chippewas have never received a dollar. In short James I. Coffey is opposing at Washington everything that the Chippewa Indians one and all desire.

This is not a partisan or haphazard statement. It is the literal truth. The following letter written by the members of the Legislative Committee to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs sets out the position taken by James I. Coffey with reference to Chippewa matters. This letter, filed with the Indian Bureau, recites facts which occurred in the presence of the Commissioner and is therefore authentic. The Chippewa Indians should immediately write John W. Carl, B. L. Fairbanks and Henry Warren, National Hotel, Washington, D. C., and advise them whether they approve or disapprove of the course being pursued by James I. Coffey and whether Coffey is correctly representing their views. The letter follows:

Washington, D. C. Jan. 28, 1918.

The Commissioner, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Commissioner:

Pursuant to your suggestions at the conclusion of our conference last night relating to Chippewa affairs in general and to H. R. 8841 and H. R. 8859 in particular, we submit herewith a statement in refutation of the charges and contentions made and presented by James I. Coffey.

At the inception we desire it distinctly understood that Mr. Coffey appeared before you solely in his individual capacity and had

no authority to speak for any Chippewas in Minnesota other than himself. Upon this point we desire to be specific. Upon assurances given by him to the President of our General Council that if appointed a member of the Legislative Committee he would cooperate to the best of his ability with the other members of said committee in securing a fulfillment of all treaty and agreement obligations to our people by the United States and would carry into effect the specific instructions given the Legislative Committee by our General Council and its Executive Committee, he was appointed a member of the Legislative Committee on Nov. 20, 1917. He came to Washington and for a time seemingly worked in perfect harmony with our delegation. He sat as a member of our committee day by day and considered in detail our various matters and indorsed the letter of the Legislative Committee addressed to you under date of January 2, 1918, which appears in full in the Congressional Record of Jan. 21, 1918, pages 1223-6. He asked to be permitted to sign that letter but the delegation, following established form, caused the same to be signed only by its Chairman after it had been approved by the entire Legislative Committee including Coffey. He never realized before the extent and magnitude of our claims against the United States and the losses we had sustained by mismanagement of our estate. Then he conceived the idea that he could attend a law school in the City of Washington, at the expense of the Chippewa Indians, and in the course of a year or two equip himself so that he might represent the Chippewa Indians, in the prosecution of their claims against the Federal Government arising out of unfulfilled treaty and agreement stipulations. To effectuate this scheme and to prevent action being taken that would enable the Chippewa Indians to secure an early and speedy adjustment of their matters until he could equip himself to become the self constituted legal adviser of the Chippewas he commenced a systematic course of interposing petty and captious objections to everything that was suggested by the delegates except an appropriation out of the trust funds of the Chippewa Indians to pay the expenses of holding a General Council and to pay the hotel and other expenses of a delegation to remain in Washington and do nothing other than afford him an opportunity to attend law school. This the delegation refused to accede to, insisting upon taking up the business of the tribe and disposing of it as expeditiously as possible and at a minimum cost to the tribe. The situation became so intolerable that the President of our General Council, Mr. John G. Morrison, Jr., was called to Washington and the entire facts, in the presence of Mr. Coffey, laid before Mr. Morrison. Mr. Morrison approved our course and insisted upon an immediate change in the position taken by Coffey. Thereupon on the 8th day of January, 1918, James I. Coffey tendered his resignation as a mem-

ber of the Legislative Committee to Mr. Morrison which was promptly accepted and his successor appointed, as will more particularly appear from annexed copy of the appointment of his successor.

At the General Council held in July, 1917, James I. Coffey introduced the following resolution, known as Resolution No. 7:

'IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, that every band of Indians residing upon the various Chippewa Indian Reservations in Minnesota is fully represented, concerning all tribal matters at the General Council of the Chippewa Indians of Minnesota, that full power is hereby conferred, by and every delegation representing the various reservations in Minnesota, to the General Council to represent each and all of said reservations before the Department of the Interior, and before the Congress of the United States, in all matters relating to and concerning tribal affairs, and that said General Council shall be recognized as the duly and only representative body of all the Chippewa Indian reservations in Minnesota in tribal affairs, by the Department of the Interior and the Congress of the United States at Washington, D. C.'

Thus under a resolution proposed by Coffey and adopted by the General Council he is deprived of any authority to speak for the Chippewa Indians in any capacity, as he has no authority from the General Council. He is no longer a member of our delegation and is remaining at Washington in his individual capacity solely for the purpose of preventing us, so far as he can, from accomplishing anything for the relief of our people.

At the hearing last night before you Mr. Coffey entered a vigorous protest against sections 2 and 4 of H. R. 8841. This bill was drawn in strict conformity with our views as set out in our letter to you dated January 2, 1918, and which letter was duly approved paragraph by paragraph by James I. Coffey before it was delivered to you. He accompanied our delegation to your office and was personally present when said letter was handed you and made no objections.

Section 2 is designed and intended to recover from the Government compensation for all property of the Chippewa Indians that has been illegally taken by the United States. This includes large tracts of land ceded by the Chippewa Indians to the United States in trust under the agreement of 1889 to be sold and disposed of and the net proceeds placed in the Treasury of the United States to the credit of the Chippewa Indians which have been taken by the United States, in violation of the terms of the cession, and without any consideration whatever to the Chippewas and given to the State of Minnesota for forest reserve purposes or as swamp and over flowed land; it also includes lands improperly taken by the United States and locked up in forest reserves in violation of the terms of our agreement occasioning losses to our people aggregating millions of dollars. James I. Coffey has either ignorantly or for the purpose of deception written to many of our people telling them that this section turned over all our property to the United States and involved us in some gigantic law suit which would cost the Chippewa Indians the greater portion of the amount they would recover. At the hearing last night it was conceded that our right to the property thus taken could only be determined by the Court of Claims and that that was the proper tribunal to determine our rights. Notwithstanding this it is universally conceded James I. Coffey is deliberately circulating among our people false and mendacious statements for the sole

purpose of attempting to tie our hands and prevent anything being accomplished until he can complete his course at some law school and then become the self constituted adviser of the Chippewas.

Section 4 of H. R. 8841 provides for the payment of all funds of mixed blood Chippewas held in trust to them and likewise provides for the issuance of fee simple patents to all adult mixed blood Chippewas covering allotments of land to them. It is merely an extension of the Clapp Act, (which related exclusively to the Indians who were allotted on the White Earth Reservation), to all other Chippewas in Minnesota. It gives to the Chippewas allotted off the White Earth Reservation the same right given in 1908 to the Chippewas allotted on the White Earth Reservation. Our people are practically unanimous in favor of this legislation and James I. Coffey who appeared before you last night and insisted upon retaining all of the existing restrictions upon the lands and funds of our people, against which they are daily protesting, on January 2, 1918, less than 30 days ago, insisted that what the bill provides should be done. We call your attention specifically to the 14th complaint contained in said letter, and to the concluding portion thereof. He is a veritable Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

We now call your attention to the captious objections of James I. Coffey to H. R. 8859. As stated to you by him last night he makes no objection to the five items therein contained appropriating money to pay the five Indian chiefs, but objects to the present payment of the

claim of B. L. Fairbanks and the estate of Gus. H. Beaulieu. He admitted that these last two claims were meritorious and ought to be paid, but insisted that the Executive Committee of the General Council had no authority under our constitution and by-laws to authorize or instruct the legislative committee to insist upon their payment. That objection was puerile and silly and was made for the purpose of indirectly attacking and preventing the payment of the claims of the five chiefs as he well knows congress will not take these matters up piece meal. The facts are as follows:

At the General council held at White Earth in June, 1915, a resolution was adopted providing for the payment to Gus. H. Beaulieu of \$2,500 per annum from June 8, 1896, to Dec. 31, 1914, for services rendered and money expended in the prosecution of the Mille Lac case, and to B. L. Fairbanks and the five Indian chiefs of an amount equal to \$3,500 per annum from July 6, 1896, to Dec. 31, 1914, or a total compensation of more than \$110,000. We attach hereto statement prepared by Gus. H. Beaulieu which sets out said resolution of the General council which will be found on pages 2-5.

At the General council held at Bemidji in July, 1917, the following resolution was adopted:

'RESOLUTION NO. 15.' 'BE IT RESOLVED, by the General council of all the Chippewas of Minnesota, duly assembled in session at the city of Bemidji, this 12th day of July, 1917, that whereas on the 12th day of June, 1915, at the town of White Earth, county of Becker, State of Minne-

sota, at a general meeting of the council of the Chippewas of Minnesota, held at the said town of White Earth, and resolution No. 9 was adopted, which authorized the payment of certain attorneys' fees in the so-called Mille Lac land case, and which authorized the payment of large fees to Gus. H. Beaulieu, B. L. Fairbanks, Wah we yeacung, Ain dua o geshig and other chiefs and head men of the Mille Lac Band, which resolution purported to be for the payment of attorneys' fees and salaries in the prosecution of said Mille Lac case, and whereas, it is considered that the fees mentioned in such resolution were extortionate and the vouchers concerning the expenditures in connection with said Mille Lac case have never been properly presented and ratified by the General council.

'THEREFORE, be it Resolved, that the said resolution No. 9, adopted at the said meeting of the General council held at White Earth on June 12, 1915, and the whole thereof is hereby repealed this 12th day of July, 1917'

This resolution did not condemn nor repudiate the claims of Gus. H. Beaulieu and B. L. Fairbanks but merely rescinded the previous action of the council on the ground that the amounts named in the previous resolution were excessive. The same council adopted resolution No. 20 directing the legislative committee to secure appropriations paying the five Indian chiefs the amounts named in H. R. 8859 and totaling \$11,500. No action was taken on the claims of Beaulieu and Fairbanks. The executive committee at its meeting held on Nov. 20, 1917, took up and considered the claims of Beaulieu and Fairbanks and sealed them down

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