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Speech to British Government Concerning Indian Land Claims, Niagara, March 25, 1798

by Joseph Brant

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Our present situation, as also various reports induces me to make use of the following language

Sir

As I understand Government are positively determined to purchase the whole of the remainder of the Mepisaga lands, and that they think I persuade these people from parting with it, I think it necessary you should know my sentiments on that subject.

When Wabbehtkanyr was yet alive some years ago he repeatedly made me promise to be as a guardian to their lands; but was particularly more urgent when he found Government disputed the spot of ground he had presented me with, and would not allow of it on any other conditions than themselves purchasing it and giving it me, this interference making him more suspicious — Also since his death, his people have obliged me to renew the promise, consequently after having thus promised I cannot decline advising them, when they consult me, to retain some of their lands, for unless they do they certainly will be beggars, and be much distressed: should however the interest of the Country absolutely require some part of their lands, certainly friendship would make them take it into consideration; but to deprive them of it wantonly is a different affair — The jealousy of Government

here

here surprises me very often, they are always ready to suspect people of endeavoring to thwart their projects, It comes rather hard to me such suspicions after having taken so much trouble to promote the welfare of this Country; at the end of the war I was first in urging Gov. Haldimand to make the purchase from below up to the head of the Bay of Quinty, and afterwards in this quarter, and to encourage the settlement of the country. — Since that time I have repeatedly been to the Westward, to keep the Indians there in a unity of sentiments with us, and consequently friendly to the growth of the new settlements: looking upon myself acquainted with the interests of the country, in consideration of the pains I have taken to promote its welfare, as also my known attachment to Government, I think I may with propriety speak freely my sentiments, as I think in several instances, they seem to put aside the old covenant chain and not to act so brotherly as might be expected, for instance the great trouble we have had with our lands on the Grand River, and now to think to take all the Missisagas Land, should they conduct themselves in this manner how can we distinguish between our brothers the English, and enemies the Americans. The American Government have the pre-emptive right, that is to say better than half claim to the land, and are ready to take the whole when they can, though at all the different councils they acknowledge the

Indians

Indians a free and independent people, at the same time their land is not free, we have not however much reason to be surprised at them; but I am sorry it seems to be much the same with our brother the English, they will not allow the Indians to sell or give as they please; but will take the whole themselves if they can, at as low a rate as possible, I have often felt surprised & ashamed at this conduct of our friends so nearly resembling the Yankees, not knowing what to say in their defence; I look upon myself as the best friend the Government has among Indians, as the above mentioned troubles I look is a proof of— and my steady & uniform conduct is I think a sufficient proof of my disinterestedness, and am ready now to the utmost in my power to advance and support the welfare of the country. At present however my Opinion differs from Government, as I do not think it policy that they should urge the Mispiragas or Chippawas to part with the whole of their lands, if not appearing necessary, or even to take them if they should be willing to part with them, let us once suppose that there might be no war this twenty or thirty Years, in which Government might have occasion for the services of Indians, if on this consideration they should forget Old customs, neglect and slight them, and endeavor to deprive them of all their

their lands; it might appear agreeable enough to your policy, though it would be unkind and ungenerous, and be looked on by the Indians as a breach of faith, but in the present uncertain times, I think it highly impolitic to hurt in any degree the feelings of the Indians — I cannot omit saying a few words of that unworthy Rascal Ramsey, it surprises me that he should be countenanced, as I hear he tells the Missisagas he corresponds with the President, what can such a fellow know concerning the Interests of the Country? that he dares have the impudence to traduce characters in it, if Government dont take notice of this mischievous fellow, I apprehend we shall be obliged to handle him. —

Niagara March 25th 1798.

Capt^l Clause

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Memorandum
March 25th 1798