

Chief Seattle speaks

In 1854 the Great White Chief in Washington, President Franklin Pierce, made an offer for a large area of Indian land and promised a reservation for the Indian people. Chief Seattle's reply, published here in full, has been described as the most beautiful and profound statement on the environment ever made.

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing, and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man.

The white man's dead forget the country of their birth when they go to walk among the stars. Our dead never forget this beautiful earth, for it is the mother of the red man. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and man - all belong to the same family.

So, when the Great Chief of Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land, he asks much of us. The Great Chief sends word he will reserve us a place so that we can live comfortably to ourselves. He will be our father and we will be his children. So we will consider your offer to buy our land. But it will not be easy. For this land is sacred to us.

This shining water that moves in the streams and the rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you land, you must remember that it is sacred, and you must teach your children that is sacred, and that each ghastly reflection in the clear water of the lake tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father.

The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst. The rivers carry our canoes, and feed our children. If we sell you our land, you must remember, and teach your children that the rivers are our brothers, and yours, and you must henceforth give the rivers the kindness you would give any brother.

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his fathers' graves and his children's birthright is forgotten. He treats his mother the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert.

I do not know. Our ways are different from your ways. The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the red man. But perhaps it is because the red man is a savage and does not understand.

There is no quiet place in the white man's cities. No place to hear the unfurling of leaves in spring, or the rustle of an insect's wings. But perhaps it is because I am a savage and do not understand. The clatter only seems to insult the ears. And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lonely cry of the whippoorwill or the arguments of the frogs around a pond at night? I am a red man and do not understand. The Indians prefer the soft sound of the wind darting over the face of a pond, and the smell of the

wind itself, cleansed by rain or scented with the pine cone.

The air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath: the beast, the tree, the man, they all share the same breath. The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to the stench. But if we sell you our land, you must remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also received his last sigh. And if we sell your our land, your must keep it apart and sacred, as a place where even the white man can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow's flowers.

So we will consider your offer to buy our land. If we decide to accept I will make one condition. The white man must treat the beasts of his land as his brothers.

I am savage and I do not understand any other way. I have seen a thousand rotting buffalos on the prairie, left by the White man

who shot them from a passing train. I am a savage and I do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be more important than the buffalo that we kill only to stay alive.

What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.

You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

Even the white man, whose God walks and talks to him as friend to friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may

be brothers after all. We shall see. One thing we know which the white man may one day discover—our god is the same God. You may think that you own Him as you wish to own our land, but you cannot. He is the God of man and his compassion is equal for the red man and the white man. This earth is precious to him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt upon its Creator. The Whites, too, shall pass; perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Contaminate your bed, and you will one night suffocate in your waste.

But in your perishing, you will shine brightly, fired by the strength of the God who brought you to this land and for some special purpose gave you dominion over this land and over the red man. That destiny is a mystery to us, for we do not understand when the buffalo are all slaughtered, the wild horses are tamed, the secret corners of the forest heavy with the scent of many men, and the view of the ripe hills lotted out by talking wires. Where is the thicket? Gone. Where is the eagle? Gone.

The Acadian challenge: the new future

By Neil Brennan

There is an ominous cloud wafting over Acadia today, its intent is uncertain. Does it portend a fertile rain giving rise to improved minority language rights, a continued commitment to the status quo or does it threaten an outright extinguishment of hard fought for and won French language rights throughout Canada? Faced with the prospect of a Canada without Quebec, the rise of the Reform Party in the West and an official opposition party in New Brunswick with a mandate diametrically opposed to the support of French language rights, French speaking Canadians outside of Quebec (and with particular respect to this discussion, within Atlantic Canada) have every right to be concerned. No legitimate debate on Atlantic Canadian political union or on constitutional change can proceed without the concerns of this population at the forefront, alongside such issues as native self government.

An examination of the changing political climate suggests that there is a developing trend of a rejection of the Trudeau-era concept of a bilingual-multi-cultural Canada. As well, the possibility of a Canada separated by a sovereign nation is a realistic one. The combination of these factors could well lead to an extremely adverse impact upon minority language rights.

Quebec has long been the arbiter for French language rights within the Canadian federation. If it weren't for Quebec's (Lower Canada's) participation in the confederation process it is certain that language rights would never have been an issue. Clear evidence for this may be found in the fact that it was only eighty years prior to Charlottetown that the British Colonists made known their views on Acadian citizen's rights with the British Acadian Expulsion. (In itself this event would be enough for us to justify a complete rethinking of our system of government as one borne of the repugnant concept of colonialism). In a Canada 'sans Quebec' French speakers would find themselves more of a minority than ever before, approximately 5% of total population. (Roughly equivalent to the Swedish speaking population of Finland

and have you ever heard of them?)

The Constitution Act 1867 and the Constitution Act 1982 guarantee the French speaking population certain protections regardless of their location in Canada, such as the right to Federal government services in either language, right to use either language in the debates of Federal Government, etc. . . These protections are, for the most part, copied in all legislation respecting New Brunswick, Canada's only officially bilingual province. As well, Ontario has enacted legislation according Franco-Ontarians more rights than Ontario is obliged to respect by

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virtue of any constitutional provision. While far from perfect these are, political considerations aside, examples of the potential of Canadians to respect the rights of minority groups. However, certain trends in the political climate tend to suggest that the future could produce a path leading away from such a status.

Undeniably, reform of the current political structure is forthcoming. The constitutional reforms proposed anticipate Quebec's full participation in the Canadian federation and are based on that premise. In the background looms 'the west' and the Reform Party. While their specific mandate regarding language rights is vague, it would be naive to believe anything other than that they pose a threat to continued protection for language rights. In New Brunswick the election of eight CoR members to the Provincial Legislature speaks for itself. No matter what language they couch it in, no matter how many letters to the Editor they write suggesting the contrary, this is a party

who by their actions and statements do not and will not respect the fundamental principles of minority language rights guaranteed by the present Constitution.

If the unfortunate were to occur and Quebec were to chart her own course as sovereign nation there is no question that there would be a groundswell of resentment toward that Province, above and beyond that which exists today (it is also likely that that resentment could extend to all French speaking Canadians). The rest of Canada would feel insulted at being rejected by a people to whom they feel they have offered so much in terms of conciliatory efforts. In this scenario the Constitution would come under intense scrutiny as the nation, if it so chose, rebuilt itself and its institutions. It is difficult to be less than optimistic about the prospects for a continued commitment to French language rights in that eventuality. New Brunswick would remain a special case given its unchanged demographic structure and the equal protection it guarantees the French language in its institutions. Despite the fact that this protection is entrenched in the Constitution all could be subject to change as new constitutional reforms are proposed without Quebec's language interests represented.

We have seen the products of emotionally charged political spectrums in Quebec's Bill 101, Bill 178 and the Sault Ste. Marie incident. We have seen The Journal belabour contentious language incidents, such as the Brockville flag burning, to the point of congestion within the collective public lungs. None of these issues have achieved a satisfactory resolution.

Resolution after the fact is not an attractive option for an issue as serious as the protection of minority language rights. Before we proceed with any type of change in Atlantic Canada or in Canada as a whole we must recognize the vested interests of such sectors of the population as the Acadian, indeed all French language speakers outside of Quebec. Without this recognition their rights are insecure and to put the fundamental rights of any one group at risk is to expose one's own rights.