

What's to be done

by Harold Cardinal

This is an abridged version of a speech given at Glendon College by Cardinal, a Cree Indian from Alberta and a leading spokesman for the rights of the native peoples in Canada. He is also the author of *The Unjust Society*, a discussion of the tragedy of Canada's Indians. — Reprint *Excalibur*.

A year and a half ago, when we met in this hall, our people were in the process of what were called 'consultation meetings.'

There, we were to embark on a new path to seek, in partnership with the federal government, those ways and means which would help our people alleviate the difficult problems that they face in all aspects of their life.

At that time we reflected a certain dissatisfaction with the consultation process.

Even then, we felt that there were indications that the consultation process was being carried out with less than the sincerity which was being publically proclaimed by different government officials.

In Alberta we spent three months in intensive local meetings with the people and local leaders, to discuss what it was we were going to propose.

After those three intensive months of consultation amongst ourselves, we entered into a week long deliberation, where we identified the common aspirations of our people in Alberta.

At that time we elected six representatives, to represent the province of Alberta in the national consultation meeting in Ottawa, where we were to meet with Indian representatives from all parts of the country.

We met for five intensive days of discussion.

At the end of that national consultation meeting, there was a unanimous decision — there was unity in spirit and in fact.

We made it very clear to the minister of Indian Affairs (Jean Chretien) what it was that we wanted.

It was made explicitly clear to the federal government that

the most basic problem that had to be tackled and solved was that of the credibility of the federal government, in as far as our people were concerned

The WHITE Paper

In June of 1969, the minister delivered in the House of Commons a paper which I have called the WHITE Paper, outlining the position of the government in relation to the Indians of the country.

Upon intensive examination by ourselves and our resource people of the WHITE Paper, it became clear to us that we had just gone through an exercise in futility for the course of one year.

It is probably the most frustrating experience an individual can undergo, when after all the work that you have done . . . that the people who you are supposed to be talking to had not listened, or if they had, had not cared.

They had made up their minds before we began to talk to them.

One of the most ironic statements, in fact, one of the most ridiculous statements of the WHITE Paper is the impression that it tries to give to the Canadian people that the contents of the paper were in response to things said by Indians throughout the consultation process

As far as we are concerned the consultation meetings were nothing but a massive public relations campaign that enabled the federal government to say that it had 'consulted' our people.

The situation has changed drastically since I was here last.

The Indian people of this country face the most serious

threat of extinction of legalized cultural genocide, the betrayal of all treaties, and all honour that had been attached to those treaties, and the destruction of our lands, our resources, our homes.

It is this threat that has angered and frustrated Indian leaders at all levels.

The authors of the WHITE Paper were probably the most expert propagandists that his

Local Conference Points

Delegates to the U.C. meeting of the Minds conference decided on 10 major recommendations arising from the weekend conference on the state of education in New Brunswick for Indians.

"We are only assuming the role in these recommendations that we, the Indian people, are capable of assuming," explained Graden Nicholas, chairman of the three-day conference held on the St. Thomas University campus.

"We want to assume our role as a responsible third party in any negotiations dealing with Indian matters between the provincial and federal governments. We will act as a bargaining power equal with both levels of governments," he said.

The ten points from the

conference are:

- We want a province-wide education committee set up immediately to take action in meeting the needs of the Indian people of New Brunswick;
- Indians should have their own school in their own community to the end of Grade 9;
- The standard in Indian schools should be the equivalent of provincial standards;
- Teachers should be specially qualified by education and attitude to teach Indian children. (Teachers who are not Indian must have special training in Indian culture);
- Research, in Indian history, language and culture is essential in the development of suitable textbooks used in the curriculum of New Brunswick

THE UNJUST SOCIETY

HAROLD CARDINAL



THE TRAGEDY OF CANADA'S INDIANS

country has ever created

The government relies on a lot of doubletalk and doubleplay in trying to convince the Canadian public in its mythical concept of 'equality.'

They say that Indian people are poor today because they have been discriminated against, legally and constitutionally.

While many Indian people would tend to agree that there has been legal discrimination Indian people would intensely disagree with the concept that so-called 'constitutional discrimination' has resulted in the plight of the Indian today

schools;

- Improved counselling services should be provided to meet the needs of the Indian students;
- Communication between parents, teachers and students must be greatly improved;
- Youth exchange programs should be established between Indian and non-Indian communities to improve understanding and co-operation;
- Indians must be involved in the planning and management of their schools, including curriculum development and the employment of teachers; and,
- Indians must be equal partners in all future educational agreements between federal and provincial governments where Indian people are concerned.

Land ownership

What would probably be one of the most hilarious sections of the WHITE Paper, if it were not so serious, and the Canadian public were not so gullible, is the section which introduces the concept of land ownership to Indian people.

The government says that the status of the land has had a lot to do with the poverty of the Indian because they have not had access to the normal channels of the lending agencies.

Therefore, what they propose to do is set up transitional legislation, on a temporary basis, where land ownership and land control

fine. For people who are not aware of the situation, they feel that you could not ask for a better deal.

Yet, when one considers the practical aspects, one has to come up with a different conclusion.

What does the concept of land ownership as enunciated by the WHITE Paper mean to the Indian living on his reserve?

Because of the legal set-up, all Indian people are entitled equally to reserve land.

In Alberta we look at what this meant in terms of our reserves.

When we compared the population of our reserves to the land base that is available within the confines of our reserves, we find that probably the larger reserves would have about 70 acres per individual.

The average probably ranges anywhere from 3 to 10 acres per individual.

10 acres useless

So we said "Fine! At last we're going to own 10 acres of land."

But then we wonder what we are going to do with this land. What kind of living can you make from 10 acres of land, especially when you consider that from the same government, in another department, that if we rely on an agriculture base, that same government tells us that we need at least 600 acres of land in order to make that an economic unit, in other words to make a living.

We're far short with 10 acres.

If there was the proper research done, we would probably find that the taxation assessed by federal, provincial and municipal governments would be far above the possible revenue that the 10 acres of land could produce.

And if we could not pay our taxes, then the government would take our lands away.

So this is what we mean when we say that our reserves and lands are being threatened.

The government has worked out this devious plan to do a number of things beside what I have discussed

By being able to do away with Indian lands (because if all reserves were individually owned, they would cease to have the status of reserves), they would also be able to legally define the word Indian

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