

CHAPTER 3

THREE AREAS OF CRITICAL CONCERN

The discussion of the *Indian Act* and departmental policies illustrated some of the institutional obstacles to Indian control of their own affairs. Witnesses' responses to the band government proposal show that they reject the Department's proposed solutions to these problems. In conveying to the Committee their frustration with the current state of affairs, Indian witnesses gave convincing testimony about the importance of Indian control in areas central to the cultures of the First Nations. They asserted that in some cases only Indian control of legislation and policy would ensure the survival and development of Indian communities. Three areas of critical concern were education, child welfare and health.

Witnesses documented the damage to Indian cultures that has occurred in the past. Their description of the severe limitations of today's bureaucratic solutions made the need for fundamental change clear. By describing new projects—already underway despite all the restrictions—witnesses showed that Indian communities and organizations will take the initiative, and that immediate change is possible. After hearing the persuasive arguments documented in this chapter, the Committee developed its own recommendations, which it believes will deal with these areas of critical concern, among others.

Education

External control of the education of Indian children has been destructive of Indian culture. The early years of missionary and DIAND-operated residential schools were particularly condemned by witnesses.

It was believed that by removing Indian youth from their homes and placing them in captive environments, the heart and soul of Indian culture would be removed, or a process of de-Indianizing the Indians. Specifically, residential school Indians were not permitted to speak their language, practise their religious beliefs and rituals, or have the opportunity to