

# Apartheid in Canada

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The views expressed herein are those of the author; they by no means represent those of the *Brunswickian* or the larger University community.

Anyone embarking on a discussion of native-Indian/White relations in Canada is faced, from the outset, with a virtually insoluble dilemma. Since every man is the product of the culture into which he is born, and in which he is nurtured and educated, of necessity his thinking will follow certain well-defined lines. To change one's direction of thinking is as difficult as changing the colour of one's skin.

In Canada, we practice a policy not totally unlike Apartheid in South Africa. Although very few would readily admit to this, the facts are beyond dispute. Let us look at the history of our relations with Canada's aboriginal peoples and the paradoxical situation that arose early in our history.

Protection, civilization, and assimilation have always been the goals of Canada's Indian policy. These goals were established by white government which believed that Indians were incapable of dealing with persons of European ancestry without being exploited. Therefore, the government of Canada had to "protect" the person and property of the Indian from exploitation by the European, which meant that the Indian was to have a special status in the political and social structure of Canada through Sec 91, Sub-section 24 of the B.N.A. Act of 1867. This Act gave the government exclusive jurisdiction over "Indians and Indian Land." However, the legislation by which the governments of Canada sought to fulfill their responsibility always had as its ultimate purpose the *elimination* of the Indians' special status and the means to achieve this goal was by training—that is to say, *civilizing*—the Indian in European values, to make him capable of looking after his own interests.

Eventually through this training, the Indian identity and culture would be eradicated, and the Indian would be *assimilated* and no longer in need of special status. However, rather than furthering the ultimate goal of assimilation, such legislation has only served to thwart it.

Let us go even further back and see what George F. Stanley has to say about early contact with Indians in New Brunswick:

"The New Brunswick story is not a cheerful one. Inertia seems to have been the rule in all matters relating to Indian affairs. Unauthorized settlers occupied Indian lands; others stole Indian timber. Occasionally members of the executive council uttered bleats of protest but did nothing. Nor could they do anything in the face of the pro-settler anti-Indian lobby and the inadequate funds provided by the government for Indian Affairs. When by mid-century the provincial authorities did get



Pierre Trudeau at a consultation meeting with native leaders, August, 1969.

around to dealing with Indian problems, they found it convenient to conclude that since natives were a dying race, Indian lands might as well be put up for auction to the highest White bidder. On 12, April, 1847, the assembly agreed that 'in all cases where portions of the Indian reserves in any parts of the province may be advantageously sold, they should be disposed of for actual settlement as soon as practical.' In 1867 the Federal government took over responsibility, maybe too late."

So, we can be proud of our New Brunswick heritage! I can assure you that such facts were not part of our Bicentennial celebrations. The real truth of our relations with natives remains clouded by "white" history books and "white" journalists who perceive these facts as "necessary"; i.e. racism to settle Canada with civilized people rather than red "heathens" and "barbarians."

The historical evolution of our relations is not much better. We still have the goal of assimilation, and we are still bent on the destruction of traditional Indian values, culture and lifestyle. We want them to be "white" men in everything but colour.

How truly different is our blatant racism from that of "white" South Africa? Agreed, Indians are allowed on our buses and in our stores but they suffer discrimination at every corner. They are still treated like second-class citizens and are continually bombarded with our values, our traditions and mores as being the only ones acceptable or proper. How promptly we forget what it is we hate so much about South Africa, when our own backyard is

filled with examples of racial hatred, discrimination and crimes of humanity, no less criminal than "Apartheid."

In Canada we have the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, a Federal agency designed to deal with native peoples. While natives are presently involved in the pursuit of self-government and control over their destiny, our government, through the D.I.A.N.D., instead of aiding natives in this pursuit is tightening its control, putting conditions on the services given natives and increasing their reliance on "our" bureaucracy for their very survival!

In a special committee report on Indian Self-Government many natives were in favour of changing the D.I.A.N.D.'s role saying:

"Our local Indian government must deal with a bewildering number of district, regional and national government departments. It is an expensive proposition to travel and be able to relate. We must see a transformation in the role of D.I.A.N.D. from an administrative and control agency which is "managing Indians" to a supportive and resource providing agency which we may call upon to assist in our development."

The collective experience is obviously not synthesized in our government's policies, and lessons from even the recent past remain unlearned. There is no doubt as to why natives do not trust government. Our government has never truly allowed Indian participation in pursuing their destiny. Since policy-making is basically an exercise in the selection of values to guide future behaviour, it follows in the case of Indian policy that Indians must

engage in the policy-making exercise in a meaningful and informed way.

This is the key to the future, not the development of policies behind a wall of secrecy and promises of participation that are belied by government action!

It is the Indian Act of 1876, and not the treaties, that defines the relationship between Indians and the broader Canadian society. It is important to note that the act provided the government with a comprehensive mechanism of social control. The act, although supposedly based on future assimilation, also sought to restrict contact with white society. The resulting isolation could only inhibit assimilation.

Legislation and administration are both vehicles used to strengthen government control. The central issue surrounding the failures of assimilation policy is due to Indians' isolation, racial and linguistic distinctiveness, marginality to the labour force, and the gulf between native and European cultural patterns.

Indians proved to be a difficult group to assimilate. Coupled with this is a larger reality; i.e. government policy which tried to induce Indians into a mainstream that was unwilling to accept them.

The instruments of cultural invasion such as Christianity, education and government services all failed to destroy the cultural mosaic of native peoples. It is thus obvious that these paramount failures would ensue change.

Change did come with the Trudeau "White Paper" of 1969, a piece of legislation aimed more at quieting external discontent than finding a qualitative future for natives. Trudeau's government was so imbued with a strong liberal ideology that it pursued a new approach to Indian Affairs, based on individual equality, one which de-emphasized collective survival.

The rights of the individual were to be the final cornerstone to enforce assimilation. United we stand, divided we fall. The Indians were not fools and totally rejected Trudeau's white paper. The white paper was critical evidence of our inability to consult with natives on their future. Our government has always set the agenda for natives but as I pointed out in the opening paragraph, we cannot see beyond our own white world.

This feature has supplied critical evidence of our ethno-centricity and inability to pursue a just solution to our native problem. Without consultation and a degree of self-determination, natives face cultural genocide at the hands of our dominant race. To me, cultural genocide has too many similarities to Apartheid for us to look beyond our borders to voice our disapproval with racial inequalities!

Natives in Canada are becoming more and more politicized; striving to improve their collective strength and searching for a say in their destiny. Too many Canadians see only the issue of land claims and money, money, money! The issue is much more vast than one of "material" interpretation. The sooner we realize this, the sooner we can pursue a civilized solution alongside our aboriginal peoples.