

PREFACE

While Parliament is a place for often lengthy deliberation, it can and does sometimes react quickly to the pressures and sufferings of individuals or groups.

In the present case, the newly formed Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs moved, within twenty-four hours of first being organized, to examine the Post-secondary Student Assistance Program of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and to respond to the widespread concern which the announcement of new guidelines for this program had caused in the previous two months.

We began public hearings on the Post-secondary Student Assistance Program on April 26, 1989 with an appearance by the Minister who had introduced the new guidelines in March, two months after assuming the portfolio and nine months after his predecessor had announced an intention to consult on and modify the existing policy.

We heard from a number of Indian students from universities both east and west, who brought before us in a representative way the concerns of many other students throughout the country. We have heeded their words, including those in which one student, speaking for the group, said "we entrust the members to hear our concerns with an objective ear and to report to the House of Commons our position, our rationale and our concerns" (Issue 3:6).

This we have attempted to do in the report that follows.

Besides students, we invited representative groups to appear, and to the extent possible within a short time period, we sent out word requesting written submissions from the native peoples and their organizations to help us in our examination. We are aware that we have not been able to hear from all those who might have appeared, but we heard from as broad a range of groups as the time permitted, receiving testimony from forty witnesses in the course of a little more than a month. To all of our witnesses, and to those who communicated their views to us in written form, we are deeply grateful. They have helped us see the impact of the Post-secondary Student Assistance Program upon people, in their variety and their individuality, with greater clarity.

As a Committee, we feel very fortunate to count among our number two Members of Parliament who themselves belong to Canada's First Nations.