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at the Canadian Indian problem
at pacifists through Bassek's pen
at a viewpoint by David Cruden
at John Galsworthy who said:
"If you do not think about the
future, you cannot have one."

the indian:

will imposed "white" values help to improve his lot?

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by mark dewolf

Since the turn of the century, Canada's Indian population has grown to its present figure of 230,000 people. Instead of a decrease in the numbers of the Canadian Indian, the increase in their population is at present among the highest ever recorded for any group. It is this explosion in population and the sub-standard living conditions of most Canadian Indians that will in the near future demand the attention of Canadian government and indeed the whole nation.

An exploding Indian population which has no hope of anything beyond minimal standards of living raises a threat to the Canadian government and non-Indian population that is fast becoming our major domestic problem.

The problem, growing steadily under the noses of both government and citizen, is essentially one of numbers. If there is no decline in the rate of natural increase of the Canadian Indian in the near future which statistics prove unlikely, the Indian population of Canada could reach 1,000,000 within the next 25 years.

This would be a rate of growth in excess of the Colonial American rate that Malthus called "almost without parallel in history."

The rate of natural increase for the whole of Canada, now apparently stabilized at around 18 per 1,000, is one of the highest national rates in the world. The Indian rate, however, rose faster and higher and seems now to have stabilized at about 46 per 1,000 population.

This remarkable growth took place without the aid of immigration and despite the loss of some people who disappeared into the general ("white") population. It is to be accounted for in part by the reduction of mortality resulting from much improved health services and better diet, and is partly a manifestation of the rapid rise in the rate of natural increase that began in most segments of the population of Canada and the United States in 1941.

The striking feature of this population explosion is its effect on the age structure of Canadian Indian, creating new social problems, which may someday explode in our faces.

In January of 1963, 55.8 per cent of the total Indian population was under the age of 20 while 45.7 per cent (90,631 people) were under the age of 15.

The point to note is that the Indian population is a young one. The Indian is not dying; he is being born to parents (or an unwed mother) in a reservation already backward in economic and educational facilities. He is taking a lead from elders who often have little to offer, at least compared with "white" values.

The present living standards of the Canadian Indian cannot be overlooked.

Over 16 per cent of Indian families in Canada live in one-room shacks against eight per cent of non-Indian families in similar communities. Over 50 per cent of Indian families live in a house of three rooms or less. Only 43.9 per cent of Indian families in Canada have electricity in their homes against a percentage of 98.6 per cent among the non-Indian population. Only 13.3 per cent of Indian homes have running water compared to 92.4 per cent of non-Indian homes.

The housing situation is becoming worse every year because the home-building program has not kept pace with the growing population. What chance has the average Indian youngster to advance in education when in all likelihood, he will have no quiet place to study, only lamp light, no table or desk, and no means of keeping himself clean, etc.?

There has been no significant attempt over the years to help our native communities to develop new industries to take up the slack from the declining traditional industry of hunting and trapping.

It has been easier to give Indians relief than to help them adjust to modern life economically and socially.

Over 47 per cent of Indian families on Reserves in Canada earn \$1,000 per year or LESS and 74.5 per cent earn \$2,000 or less. To this, add the fact that Indian families are larger than the Canadian average.

After a study of the Canadian Indians' reservation locations, their known real and potential resources, together with the huge population increase, the conclusion seems inescapable that the independent survival of the reservation Indian will soon be impossible.

The question we should now ask—or will soon be forced to ask—is to what extent do we, the "white" population and government, have a duty to help the Indian on his terms? How far can help go before it becomes assimilation or interference to which the skeptical Indian will become hostile?

The scope of the Indian problem is too big for the Indian, in his present economic and educational condition, to handle alone. Standards of housing, nutrition, sanitation, and medical are low, although efforts are being made (from within and without) to improve them. Very few Indians have any profession, trade or skill, and the vast majority have sporadic incomes derived from construction, labor, and seasonal work in fruit, tobacco, trapping, and fishing.

Perhaps it is a consequence of their marginal position in Canadian society, lack of employment, deep feelings of hostility to the "white man" who they believe stole their heritage, and a very general feeling of frustration that the standard indices of deviation are very high on the reserves.

Delinquency, both adult and

juvenile, is dishearteningly common. Desertion, common law unions, and illegitimacy are rife. Drunkenness is a common vice of both sexes, and child neglect as a consequence is widespread. Most Indian communities show a condition bordering on demoralization. In many Indian units, traditional values and disciplines have faded out, while no new or white-man sense of responsibility have been found as a modern substitute.

The situation can be summed up as follows: existing reserves, even if their resources were fully exploited, could not in most instances support existing populations; the Indian people as a whole have few marketable skills and have such low educational levels that training or re-training of adults is hardly possible (among widespread illiteracy and an average education level not above grade four).

One of the possible policies for treatment of a native population, Canadian policy as it developed contained elements of three; assimilation and disappearance, equal co-existence with white society through cultural pluralism, and peonage-type exploitation of the Indian who is kept in a position of economic and social subservience.

Until recently, there were few signs of a policy of integration or assimilation. The Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration regarded its functions as largely supervisory, custodial and protective. The director of the Branch believed it was not possible to change the Indian way of life economically or socially to make it more conformable with white society.

Programs to improve health, housing and agricultural technique have been coupled with a major effort to improve the educational level of the Indian people.

Education will allow the Indian to become competitive in the labor market, and improve his knowledge of our modern urban-industrial society. Such policy, now developing, shows a recognition that there is an increasing disparity between Indian and white standards of living; it shows a realization that few reserves can now support their existing populations, let alone vastly increased ones.

Indian response to white efforts to improve and extend reserve education, however, has been less than enthusiastic. The word or sense of assimilation evokes hostility in almost all. Even those Ontario Indians who recognize their situation and welcome education for their children seem to envisage no great change in the structure of reserve life.

Yet the one real hope for the betterment of the Indian people is for a massive improvement in their levels of general, technical and professional education. Should this not occur, they will just not be able to find employment and their situation, bad as it is now, can only become worse.



"comrades . . . it has been brought to my attention that we have conflicting interests . . ."

Viewpoint

It is true that a recent edition of the Graduate Students' Association newsletter contained a letter from a sociologist suggesting that membership in both the GSA and the Students' Union should be voluntary.

It is also true that this appeared opposite an editorial stating that graduate students wished to have a \$5 Students' Union fee justified, much as you might wish any use of your money justified.

Naturally, it was to be expected that one or two people—hurriedly skimming the paper—would confuse the letter with the editorial; but it was hardly reasonable that they should jump into print to demonstrate this.

The Co-ordinator of Student Activities did just this thing in the Friday, Nov. 19, issue of Gateway. He implied that it would be "sheer lunacy" for the GSA to seek voluntary membership of the Students' Union.

Let me now say that it is not the fixed policy of the Graduate Students' Association that membership of either the Association or Students' Union be voluntary.

Some of Fraser Smith's other remarks also seem hasty. The \$5 fee graduate students pay for associate membership of the Students' Union was calculated on the value of the services provided by the Students' Union.

The graduate student pays the same amount for Gateway, the Telephone Directory and the use of the Students' Union Building as anybody else on campus.

Since this calculation, Mr. Smith argues, I suppose, that the Students' Union has increased the value of its services.

In this financial year, he is providing two new programmes—Culture 500 and a Teach-in on Education, at a total cost of \$810.

That is 40 per cent of the sum they have just voted themselves to give parties for themselves.

The total cost of Mr. Smith's new services is eight cents per student. Mr. Smith points out that new SUB will provide dining facilities for the dominantly graduate residences of Athabasca and Pembina.

However, such facilities are being paid for by the University in the same way that the Lister Hall dining complex is financed.

Mr. Smith's point is irrelevant to the issue of SUB financing. So is his contention that the provision of bowling and curling facilities for the possible use of students involves some extra cost.

It seems likely that these activities will be self-liquidating. In fact it is difficult to find any reason for Mr. Smith's statement that the graduate student is getting much more than five dollars' worth—unless he also believes the undergraduate is getting much more than his money's worth.

Mr. Smith's attack is typical of the kind of behaviour that the graduate student has come to expect from Students' Union officials—a systematic policy of misrepresentation which seems to be encouraged by The Gateway's preference for what it would like to print rather than the truth.

It would be a great shame if such irresponsible outbursts led to a worsening of relations between the Students' Union and the GSA.

But this seems to be their aim. Finally, let me point out that Mr. Smith is not a full-time graduate student, as The Gateway article suggests.

He has not enough time to be Warden of Athabasca Hall, Co-ordinator of Student Activities, Director of Intra-Mural Sports, President of the Inter-Fraternity Council and Director of Photo Directorate—and a student as well.

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