

Government lacks backbone, says Lubicon chief

Lubicon Indians fear depopulation

by Sheila Barry

In 1899, the Treaty Commission took to the Alberta Waterways to assign land to the native peoples of our province. The Lubicon people were inland. They never signed a treaty.

The Natural Resource Act of 1930 granted native peoples any land on which they were settled at the time. This should have guaranteed the Lubicons a land base. It did not.

It seems that the land on which the Lubicons had settled is oil rich. The provincial government deemed itself the rightful owner.

To date, the Lubicons are without a land base. They are continually harassed by the provincial government and by oil companies.

Bernard Ominyak, chief of the Lubicon band, Edward Laboucan, an elder and John Latendre, a non-status native spoke of the plight of their people, the obstinance of the provincial government, and of their hope for the future. The Thursday night session was sponsored by Edmonton's Interchurch Committee on the North (EICN).

By law, each status native of Alberta is entitled to 128 acres of land. Ominyak and his legal advisor conducted a genealogy study to determine how many of the Lubicon peoples are entitled to this land. They calculated 327 eligible natives.

The provincial government conducted a similar study, counting 12 eligible natives.

When asked why the numerical discrepancy between the two studies was so great, Ominyak replied, "That question should be redirected toward the minister in charge (of the provincial study)."

The courts did redirect that question and deemed the provincial study as "inaccurate and misleading."

The province still holds prece-



Graphic: Marie Clifford

dence over the land. Natives are continually being dropped from the official band lists. Thus the province "deletes the land claim" of the Lubicon people.

"I don't see why any government can come in and tell us who

our people are," Ominyak said. "It is up to us...we were there before the provincial government came into being."

John Latendre, a non-status native living in the area agrees. "Treaty, non-treaty working toge-

ther...struggling together, it doesn't make any difference to us."

In essence, the province is depopulating an area of resource.

Close to \$1 million in oil is taken from this land each day. Natives do not receive royalties, but they do pay taxes.

"If (they were) drilling on our reserve, we'd be entitled to royalties and would have a say."

As it stands, however, natives do not have a say. The oil companies do have a say. They say that "the Indians are getting in (their) way."

The effect resource politicking has had on the people and on their lifestyle is devastating. As translated by Ominyak, Edward Laboucan put it this way: "I have trapped and hunted all my life. I have seen changes since the oil companies came...a person cannot make a living on trapping and hunting (any more)."

"The majority of our people rely on trapping and hunting," Ominyak added, "People don't have (an alternate) way to make a living. They are forced on welfare, they turn to alcohol, especially the young."

Now a trapper goes out on a line...oil companies send out noti-

ces...he doesn't know anything. (The) oil companies are ready to destroy his traps. Trappers come in with next to nothing even though they've been out all winter."

Bernard Ominyak says his people's way of life is decimated. They need a solution now. "We're not going to last as long as they (the provincial government) are going to wait. We need public pressure to make people aware (so that) more people understand what we're faced with."

The solution, said Ominyak, lies with "making a deal with the federal government."

But there is a problem. "The provincial government wants to be sure that band and federal governments do not get too close," he said. "Most oil activity in Alberta is on this land."

He said the federal government has the power. It just lacks the "backbone to deal with it."

The public can help. "Letters sent to ministers in provincial and federal governments have had a lot of effect...(they) increase public pressure."

Despite the odds, Ominyak said he "just hopes for better results in the future..."

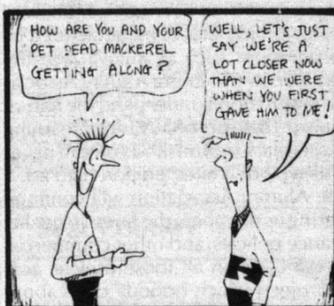
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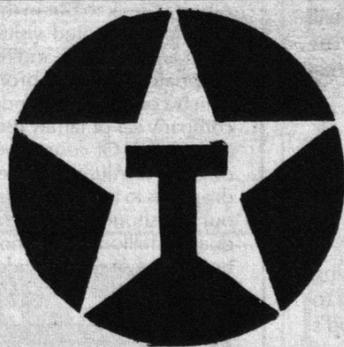
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