

Native rights, but not Government maternalism

(The New Freeman, March 23, 1991)

What Native people want most of all is to be respected for who they are, to be able to have their own rights, land rights, spiritual traditions, etc. Sometimes Natives have the view that non-native people only see them because of treaty rights and agreements in the past with the government. So natives think it is all in the sense of 'give me'

Looking at it from the other side is the maternalism of the government, and the natives don't really want that. Maternalism in that sense is always to make the Natives feel less than they are, indebting them to non-native society, and that is not what Native people want. Even the church did that. It is the story of humanity.

Were Treaties Authentic?

With the Native people there is one leader with relationship to hunting and there may be a different people or leader in relationship to the politics of the community. There would be another person for the spiritual life of the people.

The government did not understand that so they could take whoever was there to act as leader when they would ask for a leader. It may have been a hunting leader they were talking with and not necessarily a leader of the whole people. And in that way there were people who signed treaties who really didn't speak for the whole people.

Natives select leaders differently

They had their own way of selecting leaders. In some cases the selection was almost as if the people saw the gifts of this person and they developed those gifts for that person as a leader. It may have been a child in some cases but they knew that child had leadership gifts and they would develop those from a very young age. It was not an election by ballots where the mayor can be thrown out and fix up the mistakes later. You cannot do that with treaties where people misrepresented the issues.

Misrepresented

In that sense of misrepresenting, the Natives didn't understand what it meant from the government's point of view, because their sense of "the use of land was very different." The Natives had a sense of the land that it was never personal ownership.

So when they talked about sharing, about people coming into this territory, they still understood it to be their land. It was a sharing kind of experience, not ownership. It was a tradition they were brought up in for centuries.

That was the sense of common ownership - that the Creator had given them the land to look after for future

generations.

Current Resurgence

One of the most interesting things in the last few years is the whole resurgence of the Native culture and traditions. Native People are becoming really proud of their heritage, wanting to search their heritage more and having that right to celebrate in their own culture.

Native people genetically have been multiplying faster than the non-native society so that on many reserves more than fifty percent of the people are under the age of twenty-one. The faster they multiply the more they are able to speak out of their concerns. And the more you must listen to them. You have to reckon with them.

More Education?

More education has a bearing, but there is also a sense of learning the 'white people's games' and winning by playing the rules of their games. Basically that is what Elijah Harper had when he said 'no' to Meech Lake. He knew the non-native rules of the game according to the legislature. Harper could not have done that without the backing and support of his people. He had the education of being a respected lawyer and he used that gift to compete in society. It is a strong motto for the Native People that 'one person can make a difference'.

NATIVE WOMEN'S ISSUES

Helping both the offender and the victim: Violence against native women.

This is an excerpt of NWAC's presentation on February 17, 1991 concentrated on the following points: 1) NWAC's aboriginal view of violence against women, 2) How aboriginal women have dealt with violence, 3) Recommendations on how to deal with the violence.

Presenters were: Marlene Pierre, Ontario Native Women's Association; Jeanne McDonald, Quebec Native Women's Association; Carol Wortman, New Brunswick Indian Women's Council; Rose-Ann Morris, Native Women's Association of Canada

1. Aboriginal Women's View of violence

It is an exception rather than the rule to know of an Aboriginal Woman who has not experienced some form of family violence throughout her life. All Aboriginal people are affected directly or indirectly by family violence. We know too well that we cannot go on towards becoming well and fully participating members in our communities unless we begin the process of holistic healing, first within ourselves, then within our families and communities. For aboriginal people this is understood to mean that we must not only repair the harm done to those who have been abused but we also must help the abuser.

We know too well that non-Aboriginal programs are not sensitive enough to fully appreciate our values and understandings and that we can relate the incidence of violence to substance and solvent abuse, such as alcohol, drugs, glue and gas. We believe the causes are found in the history of domination, dependency, government policies, bureaucracy, the Indian Act, racism, a loss of language and culture. In the native world, it is said that family violence began when the sacred ways were left behind.

In effect, the violent reaction in the family is a reaction against an entire system of domination, lack of respect and bureaucratic control.

It is by know who we are, native to the earth; it is by caring about our families who suffer from a silent, deadly disease of the spirit, that we can replace the negative and restore health, well-being in mind, body and spirit. The family is the center of native culture, children and elders, clans, and the

extended family are all a part of the circle. Also there must be respect for woman as the first teacher to pass on, in a good way, the Teachings.

The challenge is to change attitudes and ways of thinking about our world, our place in it, relationships, politics, economics and survival. These changes must be a part of the solution and that is to restore the balance between people, male and female, youth and elders, ourselves and the earth. We believe that we will find solutions that come from the people themselves.

2. How Aboriginal women have dealt with violence

Most of the native victims of family violence are women and children and the offenders are men. The native victims must deal with the offender, or be subject to exile outside the community, from their home, far from close relatives. It is important to realize that the victim and members of the family are victimized again by the system because they must leave their home and community. Aboriginal women feel that it is the offender that is most in need of help to break the cycle of violence, but is the most ignored. But women do not want to give up their right to safety. So, the logical approach is to have intervention and take away the offender.

However, the nature of current intervention tends to punish or imprison the guilty offender rather than help them heal. For example, therapy for men is practically non-existent. Currently, we cannot force an offender to go to a program if programs are available. We will need to change the laws and the attitudes.

We need to regroup our resources to develop batter intervention programs so that

women and children are not removed. There must be treatment for the offender at a logical level. There has to be training for Police Officers and Judges. In order to bring about social change, there must be local support groups, training, intervention, and awareness of the family violence issue.

We need a coordinated approach to crisis intervention on police action, shelters and other forms of protection for the victim. There needs to be a coordinated approach to therapy for offenders and victims, training of Intervention workers, as well as, the co-ordination of training in all sectors.

The preferred approach to dealing with violence is to establish aboriginal lodges in the community for the individuals (offenders and victims) and family members to work towards healing, through their renewal of their spiritualism and customs.

3. Recommendation to deal with violence against women

The federal government, in recognition of the severity of physical, sexual, emotional abuse directed towards Aboriginal women and their families, join in partnership with the Native Women's Association of Canada and designated government department, such as the Departments of National Health and Welfare, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Secretary of State and others to set up a TASK FORCE ON ABORIGINAL FAMILY VIOLENCE to specifically address the issue of Family Violence in Aboriginal communities.

The Task Force will be mandated to develop a national strategy which will enable communities to effectively address aboriginal family violence issues and initiatives by

taking into account the uniqueness of Aboriginal Family life-styles, and the traditional holistic community approach to healing, both on and off-reserve.

The Task Force will provide an assessment of the levels of violence among Aboriginal peoples; collect available statistics, and current information on programs directed towards family violence, examine current policy and programmes with the relevant government departments, and the financial allocations which have been made to Aboriginal groups, especially Aboriginal women.

The Task Force will take on a coordinating role in the overall direction of the Aboriginal response to violence against women and children; prepare a Final Report to be presented to the Federal Cabinet; and to provide the immediate and appropriate resources necessary to the Native Women's Association of Canada, in order that they may become active in the planning and development of the national strategy.

In conclusion, Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) represents aboriginal women who have been trying to deal with violence against women and their families for a long time. These women want to "get on with the job" of healing within themselves, their families, and their communities. The best way to do this is to coordinate our efforts with the federal government and resource people to develop a national strategy as recommended above. In response to the Sub-Committee's question, a Royal commission at this time would be costly and time consuming when we need the resources to develop the ways to heal ourselves.

Na
cul
rev
ne
cat
int

by Karen Bu
Native
the sch
today
support
learn ab
cultural h
their pr
eration
nied.

Walter Pau
ents council
school recall
have been pu
is native lan
school system
among the fi
integrated i
system in th
ative studie
on-native s
2.