

# 's bt For Burning

The recently-announced Canadian government *White paper on indian policy* proposes to commit cultural genocide in eliminating what even now are minimal Indian rights, and completely ignores the historical fact that whites, as exploiters of Indian lands, owe financial and material reparations to every Indian. So claims the *Organization for social justice and reconstruction*, a committee of students and professors at the university of Waterloo who are beginning a program of research for the benefit of minority and repressed populations.

arguments for the specific points of policy: Legislative bases of discrimination must be removed.

Canada cannot just society and keep discriminatory laws in its statute books. The Government believes the self-evident.

It is all very well to wish the legal bases of discrimination, but not affect the problem unless the fundamental economic base of discrimination is removed.

And this will be done by relegating all Indians to the welfare state.

As blacks in the United States, the right to sit at a lunch counter or to be served if one still can not afford a hamburger.

Also, the legislation, which is admittedly unjust, still provides some protection for the Indian during his lifetime. The proposed government would abolish this meager protection and will not ensure the fulfillment of these promises.

2. There must be recognition by everyone of the unique contribution of Indian culture to Canadian society.

This is a basic principle, for it does the Indians to be patronized for their contribution to Canadian society if that society still continues to exploit them.

3. Services must be provided through the same channels and from the same agencies for all Canadians.

This is an undoubted principle of equality. It has been shown many times that separation of people follows from separation of common services. There can be no argument about the need of common services. It is right.

Here again, the government relies on its fundamental assumption that equal treatment is a necessity for the just society.

But as pointed out, this is not necessarily the case. Equal treatment is only justified in the case of equal needs.

Also implicit in the assumption that common services should be provided for the needs of non-Indian people is the fact that, as anyone with any familiarity with welfare services will tell you, this is surely not the case.

One significant example is the case of the Metis; these people, although classified as non-Indian and provided with the same minimal services as other Canadians, are generally found to be in a worse situation than the Indian who have separate services.

4. Those who are behind must be helped most.

This is a contradiction to the government's previous statements about equality, but it does not provide a solution to help those furthest behind.

Rather, given the principle of common services, it is apparent that the help mentioned will be seen as welfare for the poor white Canadian (the furthest behind in this society) will bear witness that he is the one who has been helped the most.

## RED LANDS WHITE PROFIT

An important part of the government's intentions may be deduced from the following passage:

Private investors have been reluctant to supply capital for projects in land which cannot be pledged as security.

American companies are eager to begin the development of the Canadian north via the Mid-Canada Development Corridor, but they cannot do so as long as the Indian reserves within that area are protected from alienation by the present Indian Act.

However, once the government lifts this protection, as it proposes to do in the white paper, the Indian lands will be able to be pledged as security for development.

little other resources, the land is all that they themselves could pledge in order to obtain necessary development capital. The land will ultimately then be taken out of Indian control.

This is one of the weaker points of the governments' proposals, especially given the Canadian government's past history of "recognizing" legal obligations to Indians.

This history of broken treaties and false promises raises grave questions as to how these "legal" obligations are to be fulfilled. Yet this is one of the crucial issues concerning Indian policy since all Indian spokesmen seem to agree that before further steps are taken to formulate an Indian policy, it is absolutely necessary to fulfill existing treaty obligations.

However in response to this concern over treaty rights, the government simply proposes to appoint a commissioner who will: classify the claims that in his judgment ought to be referred to the courts or any special quasi-judicial body that may be recommended.

What this does is simply to remove the fulfillment of these obligations one step further from the government. In effect, the government will not only decide what is "lawful", but it will also appoint a functionary who will be the sole judge of what claims will even be considered as either lawful or unlawful.

Further, although some brief mention is made of this "lawful" claims (that is, treaty rights), no mention is made of "more" obligations. This quickly absolves the government from any responsibility for the great number of Indians without treaties. It eliminates any basis for Indian claims for reparations. And it effectively

prescribes any of the aboriginal land claims, such as those being put forward in British Columbia.

The government ends the specific mention of these claims by stating:

These are so general and undefined that it is not realistic to think of them as specific claims capable of remedy except through a policy and program that will end injustice to Indians as members of the Canadian community.

The final point of the government's proposals is perhaps the most significant, for on face value it seems reasonable and just. However, the reality of its implementation could have disastrous consequences for Canadian Indians.

6. Control of Indian lands should be transferred to the Indian people.

Thus, it surely seems just that Indians have control of Indian lands; however, certain problems quickly come to light.

In the first place, as previously noted, the government will be the final judge of what actually is Indian land.

Secondly, the question arises as to how long this land will effectively remain within Indian control.

Given the reality of expropriation, the earlier-mentioned need to pledge the land as security in order to obtain necessary development capital (most probably with U. S. corporations), and the problem of land taxes, it would seem unlikely that the land would remain under Indian control for a long period of time.

And despite its earlier claim that "those furthest behind must be helped most", the government does not intend to make special tax provisions for the Indian, as evidenced by the following:

When the Indian people see that the only way they can own and fully control land is to accept

taxation the way other Canadians do, they will make that decision.

The Government then proceeds to investigate the problems of implementing this policy.

The Government proposes to ask that the associations act as the principal agencies through which consultation and negotiations would be conducted, but each band would be consulted about gaining ownership of its land holdings.

And this, in itself, raises further problems. The Indian associations mentioned were not consulted by the government in the formation of this policy but now they are to be consulted about its implementation. Given the past history of the "consultations" it would be quite surprising if the associations felt much would be accomplished by more "consultations" with the government, especially "consultations" concerning a policy to which they are solidly opposed.

Secondly, the Government states that each band would be "consulted" about its particular holdings.

The problem here is that the band is not an Indian organization at all; rather it is a unit of Indians set up for governmental administrative purposes, often overlooking tribal differences. This concept is explicitly defined (by white men, of course) in the second point of the Indian Act.

It is with this unit, and not with the Indian organizations that the government will discuss specific land transfers.

The Government hopes to have the bulk of the policy in effect within five years.

This passage is significant in two respects. In the first place, it seems to show that the government is not really too concerned with the proposed "consultations", and is preparing to go ahead with this policy.

And secondly, it shows that the government is not at all in touch with the reality Indians would face once this policy was put into practice.

Given the government's avowed intention to proceed, its refusal to consider special treatment of some compensatory sort for the Indians (perhaps reparations), and the reality of the class society and economy into which the Indians would be thrown; it can only be concluded that the government - consciously or not - will prepare within the next five years the final elimination of the Canadian Indian as a definable body within this society.

## OTTAWA ASSUMES TOO MUCH

The government concludes the white paper on Indian policy by stating:

A policy can never provide the ultimate solutions to all problems. A policy can achieve no more than is desired by the people it is intended to serve.

This shows the government's aversion to reality, since it seems the government assumes this policy is actually desired by the Indians as the solution to their situation.

But in actual fact, this policy has been virtually unanimously decried by Indian spokesmen as a program of "cultural genocide".

Finally the government states the essential feature of the government's proposed new policy for Indians is that it acknowledges that truth by recognizing the central and essential role of the Indian people in solving their own problems. It will provide, for the first time, a non-discriminatory framework within which, in an atmosphere of freedom, the Indian people could, with other Canadians, work out their own destiny.

This underscores the whole problem of the government's proposed Indian policy, for it again shows how far removed from reality the government's assessment of its own society actually is.

The government is able to offer this policy as a framework within which Indians will work out their own destiny only because it subscribes to the myth that non-Indian Canadians, who are afforded legal equality, are able themselves to control their own destiny. However well-meaning or malevolent, no government can hope to provide a realistic solution to problems when it bases its whole approach on the assumption of a myth.

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In view of this examination of the *White paper on Indian policy*, it is obvious that something is drastically wrong with the government's proposed "final solution" to the Indian's problems. This does not seem to result from any manifest government hostility or indifference to the problem (although this hostility very well might be present but unspoken).

And it does not result solely from the internal inconsistencies, distortions and half-truths found in the paper.

Rather, it follows from two main assumptions that the government makes - assumptions common to any liberal investigation of a problem which renders any liberal solution to the problem all but impossible.

THE FIRST ASSUMPTION is that "history" has somehow created all these problems for the Indian.

But as shown earlier, this ahistoric approach (common to most liberal spokesmen) serves only to obscure the fact that history consists in the actions of men relating to their specific socio-economic situation, and that white men (not some abstract entity called "history") have done this to the Indians. Thus, the liberal approach precludes the possibility of reparations to the Indians for past wrongs suffered at the hands of white men.

SECONDLY, THE government states that "special treatment" of the Indians has made them a disadvantaged group apart from the rest of Canadian society.

This ignores the historical fact that the Indians' plight had been created by negative special treatment (such as the payment of reparations to Indians to bring them up to a standard of life whereby they could enter Canadian society as truly equal economic partners if they so wish).

The reason the Government cannot deal with this point is that it assumes the common liberal myth that society, as it is now constituted, affords an equal opportunity to all of its members. That is, society forms an undifferentiated whole, devoid of classes, and that given legal equality, the Indian will be able to proceed up the ladder of social mobility as can non-Indian Canadians.

This liberal myth of a classless, upwardly-mobile socio-economic whole had been ably exploded by John Porter's book *The vertical mosaic*, which clearly documents the existence of rigid classes, without possibility of upward movement in Canadian society.

Thus, in the final analysis, the government white paper cannot hope to offer a viable solution to the problems confronting Canadian Indians because it is based on a mythical model of Canadian society which does not correspond to the socio-economic reality with which all Canadians, Indian and non-Indian, are faced.