

indian leaders reject white schools

Unless Canadians accept what the Indian is now and is trying to become, any acts of goodwill or friendship on their parts are worse than empty gestures, they are obstacles to the Indians attempts to better himself.

This was the major theme that bound together the seemingly diverse speeches given by Chief Dan George, Kahn Tineta Horn, and Harold Cardinal at the Native Forum held in the SUB Theatre last night.

A crowd of over a thousand, including many native people, squeezed into the seats, aisles, balconies, and onto the stage of the 740-capacity auditorium to hear the three Indian leaders speak. Most ended up staying for the full three-hour meeting.

It was obvious that they all loved the soft-spoken West Coast Indian Chief Dan George who spoke so quietly and poetically of the brotherly love that he was extending to his audience.

They sat enraptured as he pleaded quietly and patiently with them to try to understand the mutual acceptance without which love between people is not possible.

"Do you say you would be my friend?" he asked of the people in the theatre. "Then, first we must talk; our relationship depends on it."

He continued, "Why do you want to be my friend? ...do you want me for what I am or am trying to be? ...or because I may be great? ...or because of where I come from? ...or where I was borne? It is not likely the way I look or dress ...my grooming is little more than a mess."

"If you see me on the street, patched jeans and dirty shirt, do you turn your heads saying this man knows only dirt?" he pressed. "Or, do you say, 'This man is a friend of mine, even though his belly is full of wine.'"

"Say what you want, but please do not blame my mom or dad ...they taught me how to live and love what I am." He added, "If to my grandchildren you could be kind, you would never know how much that would ease my mind."

He concluded with, "I would like to believe you need me as much as I need you. On the turbulent waters of life, how am I to face it without you? The decision is yours; the love I have for you is yours to leave or take. Speak no more of friendship, for today you are my brother. I have spoken ...Thank you."

The old Chief bowed as the crowd rose to applaud him.

For a variety of reasons, Kahn Tineta Horn did not win the popularity of the crowd. For one thing, the founder of the Indian Legal Defense Committee from Ontario did not issue a polite plea for the acceptance of her audience. Instead, hers was an ultimatum delivered tediously and repetitiously in such a way as to keep her predominantly white



A STUDY IN CONTRAST...

photo John Hushagen

Chief Dan George and Kahn Tineta Horn

audience suspended between cool chauvinist indignation and acute boredom.

Kahn Tineta's concern was the nature and value of the educational system which the white man has been imposing on her people. To introduce the problem, she contrasted the social success enjoyed by Canadian Jews who have developed 20,000 active professionals out of their 250,000 population, at the same time as the Canadian Indian, with the same population "with supposedly equal intelligence, ability, and opportunity had just about none."

She presented her analysis of the meaning of educational success for the Indian, "The kind of success that may produce some graduates instead of a whole lot of drop-outs," and according to which criteria, the lot of the Indian has been improving.

"I think we will produce in the next few years more capable University graduates than we've ever produced in Canada," she predicted.

Miss Horn then developed her reasons for demanding educational segregation for Indian people. "I am asking all educational bodies to give serious thought to the fact that the Indian is different, that he is the product of thousands of years of evolution that have left him physically, mentally, and spiritually suited for life as it was on the North American Continent before the coming of the white man. The few hundred years since have not changed the Indian that much - he is not suited for the life of competition and intrigue that has made our city life what it is. Indians are not going to evolve overnight into the type of people who have lived for thousands of years in a competitive city-state environment."

The Department of Indian Affairs, according to Miss Horn, has not been approaching Indian education from this evolutionary reality. As a result, most Indians drop out of the schools that have been provided, and never use their education. In fact, the patronizing white mis-education has just created more problems. It has split up families, made Indian women dissatisfied with their (rightful) role on the reserve, and made parents feel inferior to their highly educated children.

Indian treaty rights, she went on, dictate that the white man should provide the type of education that the Indian requires, the type that he says he needs in order to survive. She then proceeded to anger the audience by outlining the essential differences between this kind of education and that which the white man has been providing.

Most parents want their men trained in 'manly' technical and mechanical skills rather than have them burdened with meaningless subjects. Furthermore, they do not see formal education as important to the happy life of an Indian woman; they would rather concentrate on an all-out effort to push their menfolk through the educational barriers, according to Miss Horn.

Finally, she ran down militant student groups on university campuses for "steamrolling" Indian students, and sidelining them from the pursuit of what is really important to them as Indians. Student radicals, claimed Miss Horn, were just another element in Canadian society that has exploited and used the unsuspecting Indian for its own purposes.

As can be expected, the audience did not leave their seats to applaud the former 'Indian Princess'.

future of their children ... to house their children decently, to provide safe drinking water, and safe conditions of study.

As far as the Indian leader is concerned, Mr. Chretien, Minister of Indian Affairs, has placed himself in an extremely paradoxical position in this struggle. If the problem is solved, if the Indian people get what they want, he will 'lose face' as a minister. "How stupid can it be for a trustee to place himself in a position where the people who he is supposed to be responsible for, if these people improve their lot, he will lose face?" he asked.

The boycott of schools in North Eastern Alberta will intensify, according to Mr. Cardinal. "By Friday, if no solution is found, another reserve will go on school strike."

He went on, "We have told the Minister (Chretien) that if the situation is not solved, if we have to close down every damn office of Indian Affairs in this province, we will do so." The loss of a school year would be worth it, he added.

Harry Cardinal pointed out that the Indian people were prepared to take Mr. Chretien seriously on at least on bit of his advice; on letting the Canadian people decide the issue. "We are going to explain our case to the Canadian public, to ask that they assist in getting for our people what other citizens take for granted," he said.

He then went into the different ways that individual citizens could help. They included; writing to members of parliament, organizing student bodies throughout Canada, barrage of the Members of Parliament in Ottawa, and thinking up other strategies that might work. He then gave a summary of the Indian Association position on the situation in North East Alberta (See Editorial page).

-by Winston Gereluk



MISS HORN AND HARRY CARDINAL...

photo John Hushagen

a duet on abusive education