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native children graduate from high school as compared to 75 per cent nationally. The aboriginal people have an income of approximately half the Canadian average and unemployment, insofar as the very deficient measures of Statistics Canada are concerned, is at least four times that which is prevalent amongst the general population, and up to 90 per cent in some areas. Nearly 19 per cent of on reserve homes shelter two families. I think we should bear in mind the mortality rates amongst native people in Canada. They have a violent death rate of three times the national average. Infant mortality up to four weeks of age is 60 per cent higher than the national average and life expectancy is some 10 years less than that of non-Indian people.

Why do these stark facts relate to the lives of aboriginal people in Canada today? Is it isolation? Is it simply a matter of lack of proper services in many communities? Is it, as some would have us believe, the result of over-indulgence in alcohol and tobacco? Is it something to do with the physiological or psychological make-up of aboriginal people? It is not. These are only symptoms. They are only the outward manifestations of the animé and sense of lack of purpose which has been inflicted upon the aboriginal people of Canada by their exclusion from the mainstreams of society, whether deliberately, accidentally or with complete ignorance of such exclusion, and by the unfortunate relegation of aboriginal people in past years to the level of irrelevancy to our society. These are only symptoms of the results of treaties dishonoured, provinces which exercised jurisdiction over areas to which the aboriginal people had never ceded that control or admitted that jurisdiction. These are also symptoms of the approach of pushing, pushing, pushing aboriginal people back, not only physically and geographically but culturally and economically.

In saying this, I do not deny or attempt to subtract—indeed, I wish I had time to proclaim—the achievements of aboriginal people in spite of the regime under which they have been forced to labour. There have been achievements in the areas of health care, education, industry and the professions. There has been the very significant achievement of the unity which they have been able to forge as a response to the constitutional positions of some governments in Canada. These are very real achievements registered by aboriginal people in every area of human endeavour.

The New Democratic Party and myself continue to support the First Nations of Canada in their continuing struggle for constitutional recognition of their rights. Our Party first called for that recognition in 1973, a full nine years before the signing of the Constitution Act. In fact, we refused to give our final support for patriation until aboriginal rights were restored to the Government's proposal. Now it is time to move forward. We believe the legal right to self-government is inextricably linked to the moral right of aboriginal peoples to survive and to flourish as distinct and unique societies. We cannot rely upon the lowest common denominator approach by the provinces in providing what passes for leadership in this situation.

The Government's record-breaking mandate for change has raised the expectations of aboriginal peoples as it has of all Canadians. It is the First Nations of this country who should ultimately decide on the form of this constitutional amendment. We understand that Canada's aboriginal people have been patient, that they proposed a fair set of workable solutions and that native people cannot and should not be blamed for failures which may occur in these talks.

The situation of aboriginal peoples in Canada today has everything to do with identity. I was privileged to be at our New Democratic Party caucus meeting this morning when the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, George Erasmus, came to us and for 20 minutes riveted more than 20 practicing-professional politicians to their seats by a concise, clear and profound exposition of the identity of Canada's aboriginal people and the central importance that that identity has not only to their future but to the future of this country.

I recall as a young man, some 19 years of age, that I learned a lesson in regard to identity. I was a substitute teacher and I had a headmaster who was a Welshman. He had been making his living in England for some 30 years. I recall at one point in the staff room making a disparaging remark about the Welsh, although I myself bear a Welsh name. He turned on me and told me that when one denies a people's identity, one effectively denies that they are people and that they exist.

Why do aboriginal people continue to identify as aboriginal Canadians despite their history? It is, of course, not only because of their tradition but fundamentally because this is the only identity they have as a result of their upbringing, which was not in a society of fast motion, technological dominance, the imperatives of schedules, but rather in a society that functioned differently, was organized differently and had values which we, if we looked at them sincerely and frankly, would have to believe are superior to some of the values which underpin the city-oriented urban, technologically dominated society.

The importance of treaty identity to aboriginal people is, of course, their connection to the Crown which made those treaties. The strength that aboriginal people have used in expressing this identity has never better been portrayed than in the response to the 1969 White Paper when they stood four square and firm against the concept of assimilation which had been held by Canadian society so long, but never better articulated than in that document. I myself, as an immigrant to this country, can appreciate, perhaps with the views of one who started in Canada as an outsider, the importance of that identity to the Indian people, the aboriginal people of Canada, and the strength with which they and their Inuit cousins assert that identity. We know the very limited and minimal effects of the enfranchisement policy which was exercised for several decades by the Department of Indian Affairs. It was essentially a system of bribery to people to give up their native identity. We know how few native people took that particular bait. We know that identity is what makes martyrs and we hope that the present process will have no martyrs.