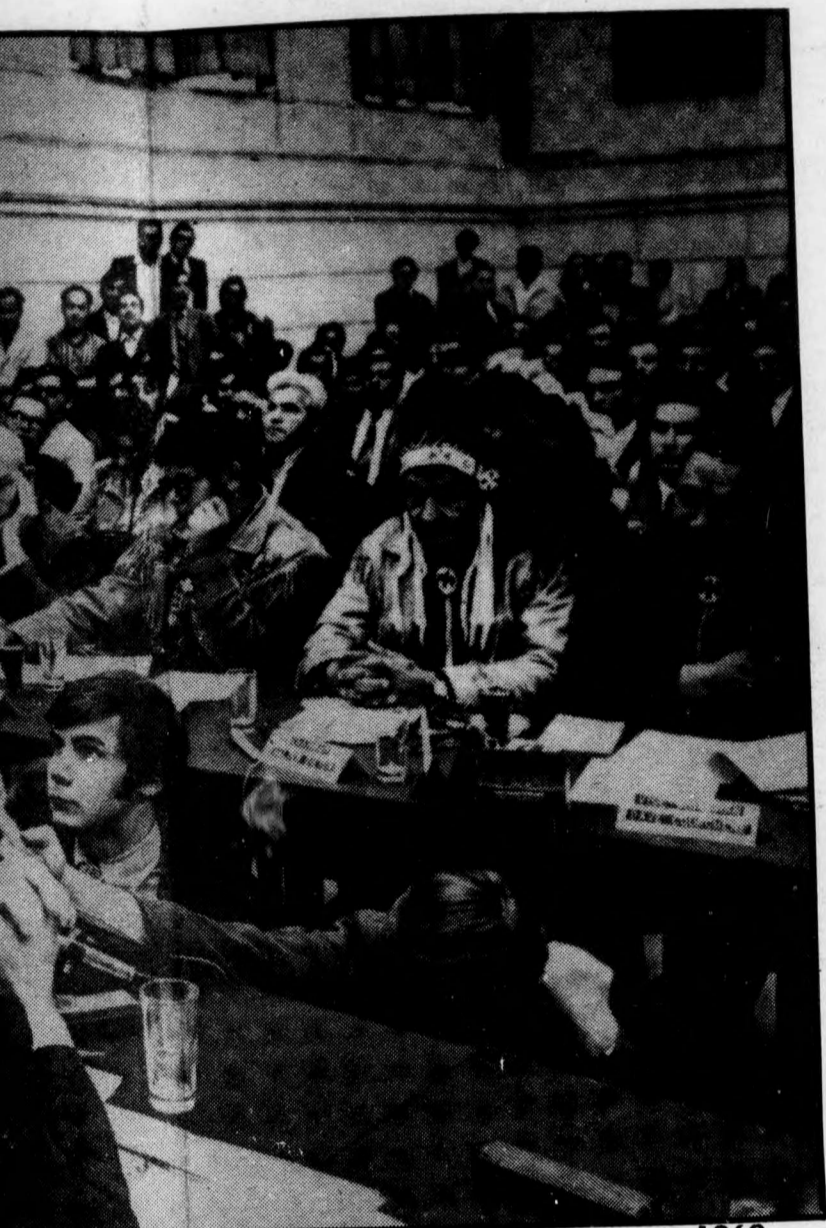


# I in Canada



on meeting with native leaders, August, 1969.

In Canada we have the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, a Federal agency designed to deal with native peoples. While natives are presently involved in the pursuit of self-government and control over their destiny, our government, through the D.I.A.N.D., instead of aiding natives in this pursuit is tightening its control, putting conditions on the services given natives and increasing their reliance on "our" bureaucracy for their very survival!

In a special committee report on Indian Self-Government many natives were in favour of changing the D.I.A.N.D.'s role saying:

"Our local Indian government must deal with a bewildering number of district, regional and national government departments. It is an expensive proposition to travel and be able to relate. We must see a transformation in the role of D.I.A.N.D. from an administrative and control agency which is "managing Indians" to a supportive and resource providing agency which we may call upon to assist in our development."

The collective experience is obviously not synthesized in our government's policies, and lessons from even the recent past remain unlearned. There is no doubt as to why natives do not trust government. Our government has never truly allowed Indian participation in pursuing their destiny. Since policy-making is basically an exercise in the selection of values to guide future behaviour, it follows in the case of Indian policy that Indians must engage in the policy-making exercise in a meaningful and informed way.

This is the key to the future, not the development of policies behind a wall of secrecy and promises of participation that are belied by government action!

It is the Indian Act of 1876, and not the treaties, that defines the relationship between Indians and the broader Canadian society. It is important to note that the act provided the government with a comprehensive mechanism of social control. The act, although supposedly based on future assimilation, also sought to restrict contact with white society. The resulting isolation could only inhibit assimilation.

Legislation and administration are both vehicles used to strengthen government control. The central issue surrounding the failures of assimilation policy is due to Indians' isolation, racial and linguistic distinctiveness, marginality to the labour force, and the gulf between native and European cultural patterns.

Indians proved to be a difficult group to assimilate. Coupled with this is a larger reality; ie. government policy which tried to induce Indians into a mainstream that was unwilling to accept them.

The instruments of cultural invasion such as Christianity, education and government services all failed to destroy the cultural mosaic of native peoples. It is thus obvious that these paramount failures would ensue change.

Change did come with the Trudeau "White Paper" of 1969, a piece of legislation aimed more at quieting external discontent than finding a qualitative future for natives. Trudeau's government was so imbued with a strong liberal ideology that it pursued a new approach to Indian Affairs, based on individual equality, one which de-emphasized collective survival.

The rights of the individual were to be the final cornerstone to enforce assimilation. United we stand, divided we fall. The Indians were not fools and totally rejected Trudeau's white paper. The white paper was critical evidence of our inability to consult with natives on their future. Our government has always set the agenda for natives but as I pointed out in the opening paragraph, we cannot see beyond our own white world.

This feature has supplied critical evidence of our ethno-centricity and inability to pursue a just solution to our native problem. Without consultation and a degree of self-determination, natives face cultural genocide at the hands of our dominant race. To me, cultural genocide has too many similarities to Apartheid for us to look beyond our borders to voice our disapproval with racial inequalities!

Natives in Canada are becoming more and more politicized; striving to improve their collective strength and searching for a say in their destiny. Too many Canadians see only the issue of land claims and money, money, money! The issue is much more vast than one of "material" interpretation. The sooner we realize this, the sooner we can pursue a civilized solution alongside our aboriginal peoples.