

Government apologizes for decades of abuse

But many Natives find government's response to Royal Commission report insufficient

BY ED JANZEN

(The Manitoban) — The federal government has formally apologized for decades of assimilation policies and abuse suffered by native peoples as a result of official government policies.

Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart made the announcement Jan. 8, in a much-anticipated response to the 4,000-page report released last year by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). Stewart apologized for the government's historic mistreatment of natives, placing specific emphasis on the physical and sexual abuse suffered by natives at Canada's residential schools.

Stewart also announced the establishment of a \$350-million "healing fund" to help victims of the residential school system. The schools "left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in aboriginal communities to this day," she said.

Canada's residential school system was established in the early 1900s as part of a federal assimilation policy, which was intended, according to then-Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott,

"to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department."

By the 1940s, approximately 8,000 native children were enrolled in residential schools, which continued to operate until the 1950s and 60s, when students were gradually transferred to provincial schools.

The residential school system gained notoriety following numerous revelations of physical and sexual abuse of children, suppression of native languages and traditional practices, and mandatory residential-school attendance enforced by the Department of Indian Affairs — even over the wishes of parents.

"Let this moment mark the end of paternalism in our relations and the beginning of empowerment of first peoples," said First Nations Grand Chief Phil Fontaine, accepting Stewart's apology.

But four other native leaders present at the apology ceremony dismissed the government's response, citing its various inadequacies.

The statement failed entirely to recognize Metis or Inuit peoples, said

Gerald Morin, president of the Metis National Council.

"Our people are not going to be satisfied with the response we've had today."

The government's response was also criticized for being far weaker than the apology that was offered by the Mulroney government to Japanese-Canadians interned during the Second World War and for barely scratching the surface of recommendations issued in the RCAP report.

Paul Chartrand, a Royal Commission member and a former

professor of Native studies at the University of Manitoba, cited the government's lack of consultation with aboriginal peoples as an impediment to the development of satisfactory policies.

"The main criticism is [the government's] failure to follow a guiding principle...which is never to develop policy without the participation of aboriginal peoples. Unfortunately that happened and that's why you saw some disappointment expressed," Chartrand said.

NDP MLA Eric Robinson felt the

apology should have come from Jean Chretien himself.

"If we're to hear a true apology, it should have come from the Prime Minister — a prime minister who tried to assimilate us into Canadian society," Robinson said.

While Indian Affairs minister in 1969 under the Trudeau government, Prime Minister Jean Chretien issued a paper on Indian policy which sought unsuccessfully to strip natives of their treaty status and assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream.

Massive Ontario tuition hikes

BY MEG MURPHY

TORONTO (CUP) — Ontario universities are buzzing about the prospect of massive tuition hikes next fall.

The frenzy comes in the wake of a Dec. 15 tuition fee announcement courtesy of provincial finance minister Ernie Eves.

Universities were given the go-ahead to raise tuition fees for professional and graduate programs as they see fit. They also have the option of increasing general tuition by 20 per cent over the next two years.

"Increases will not be determined so much by university or the ministry, but what the market will bear," said Rita Smith, press secretary to education minister Dave Johnson.

High-enrolment programs may see more fee increases because they can manage competitively despite a

higher price tag, she added.

The tuition-fee leeway came in the provincial government's two-year budget announcement, which they say increases funding to post-secondary education.

But university administrators say a little number-crunching reveals a loss to university budgets over the next few years rather than the heralded gain.

Council of Ontario Universities chair and University of Toronto president Robert Prichard says the net effect of Eves' announcement is a four per cent reduction in funding.

"Mr. Eves' announcement makes a bad situation worse with respect to public funding," he said.

Ontario is in last place among the provinces in funding for higher education.

With decreasing public funding, students can expect the price of a University of Toronto degree to be

marked up again next fall, Prichard said.

He says more student cash will be necessary to maintain quality education since the university must remain competitive with its American public-sector counterparts.

He also says areas like medicine, dentistry, law and management seem prime candidates for disproportionately high fees.

Students predict Prichard is typical of most university administrators who will lobby their governing bodies for the full 20 per cent tuition hike in the name of maintaining excellence. They also fear the sky is the limit for fees in many professional and graduate programs.

Wayne Poirier, chair of the Ontario component of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), says the student lobby group is planning a national day of protest on Jan. 28 opposing fee increases and calling for a national grant system rather than an income-related loan repayment plan.

"I think we have moved beyond inaccessible post-secondary education," he said. "For lower-income families post-secondary education is not a reality and for middle-income families there are serious limitations. Now, for many of those families it won't even be an option."

Barry McCarten, executive director of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, which represents six student unions in the province, is determined that students at least get a bang for their increasing buck.

He points to the vague conditions attached to fee increases and wants stringency from the government in ensuring they are met.

"A university can't just decide to lay off five faculty members, it has to go into something that will count," he says, asking what qualifies as an "educational improvement".

Spokespeople from the Ministry of Education say they are currently consulting with universities and hashing out appropriate guidelines and establishing specifics.

But Poirier says targeting the conditions may prove futile.

"When the criteria is vague the institution can pretty much say or do anything that will make it appear they have met the needs.

"The bottom line is that they are disguising a tuition fee announcement in which the reality means students will see a 20 per cent increase over two years," he said.

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