

The problem with Indians . . .

When Bob Beal suggested that I edit a special issue of the Gateway on Indian Education, I thought it a good suggestion. What with all of the action up North and all of the apparent interest here in Edmonton, it seemed sure that there would be no trouble finding enough good copy to put together one magazine issue.

As it turned out, I was very sorry for accepting--and it became a matter of just getting the damn thing finished.

In the first place, too many people that had displayed concern were not interested in helping after all--though to be completely fair, some threw a few crumbs my way.

Furthermore, the stupidity of the whole enterprise became overwhelmingly dear to me; I was editing a paper on Alberta's Indians when I knew absolutely nothing about them. I hadn't met very many Indians; and it occurred to me that those I had met hadn't particularly appealed to me.

It was really quite sickening. Here I was, white student in the midst of comfortable University womb, surrounded by middle class luxury and people, attempting to capture the essence of something they call "The Indian Problem".

Then, I was supposed to direct my issue at the heads of University Students, most of whom have (incredibly) no greater worries than passing a few lousy courses, finding enough money for a party, for developing newer and better ways of making out.--In other words, the most reactionary, self-seeking mass of people in our society.

Then again, it is possible that these same University students are just the ones that need an education on issues such as poverty, oppression, despair, and their causes, not with a view to helping those "poor Indians"--forget it.-- with a view to helping ourselves.

Because, it turns out that we non-Indians are the meaning of the "Indian problem". From the very beginning as we settled and planned for Canada as if the Indians didn't exist, that was the meaning of our existence for them and their's for us. Our distorted picture of them has been our wishful conception of who we are not.

We are a part of a society that legislates that Indians have been guilty of not "progressing" and therefore should willingly submit to cultural genocide in favour of our superior way of life.

The problem for the Indian and every other group unfortunate enough to contact us, has been that our way of life demands that everything be exploitable, nature and human beings alike should be easily marketable as commodities. If something is not exploitable, then it is "useless". "What good are Indians?" and "What do they contribute to our society?" are meaningful and commonly-asked questions that clearly show the problem to be with us--the askers--and our perverse orientation to the world.

Indians, as they are, show us some of the truth about ourselves; the only trouble is that we have been identifying ourselves up to now in terms of fictional Indians.

The amalgam of articles in this issue is produced, then, in the interests of Indian education, not of the Indian, but of the university student. It represents an attempt to pull together as many different articles as possible, in an arrangement that draws a picture of the Indian in this province, and of the immense problem he faces when he faces us.

Of course the story is incomplete. If I were writing it from the other perspective, i.e. about us, it may have been a much more honest representation.

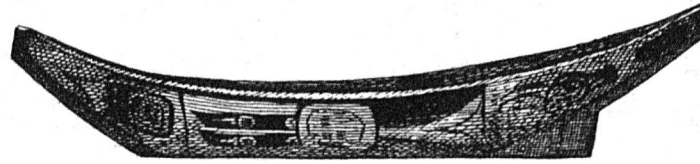
Winston Gereluk

The Gateway

member of Canadian University Press

STAFF THIS ISSUE

The braves were on the warpath tonight, stomping out this special issue. With Firewater and tommyhawks in our hot little red hands and education in our minds, we slaved our way to the end. Present were: Beth Little-squaw Nilsen, Pauline Maplebeck, Lana I'm going home Yakimchuk, Henri I only came for a few minutes Pallard, Bob Sitting Bull Beal, Confused Elsie Ross, Winston Babysitting-the-kids Gereluk, Dave Hard-at-work McCurdy, Dennis Zommerschoe, Janine the artist Sang, Ronald Geronimo Yakimchuk, Michelle Quesnel, Derek Dalsin, and your slithering, snake in the peace-pipe Harvey G. (for get me Nixon's scalp) Thomgirt.



Part of the story as far as University students are concerned was Student Council's decision to take sides in the dispute that had flared up between the treaty Indians of North East Alberta and the Federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. A brief chronology of their involvement follows:

Tuesday, October 12--The Students' Council ratified a position presented by the executive declaring unqualified support for the Indians of northeast Alberta.

The Students' Council at the University of Alberta endorses and supports the actions of the Cold Lake Indians in their boycott of schools on the reserve. They have tried all legitimate means to obtain action from the federal government on their problems and have failed. Clearly, stronger action is necessary, so is support from other groups.

In order to raise money for this cause, the Students' Union is sponsoring a concert in the Students' Union Building on October 14 with Manna and Hot Cottage. We will also make every attempt to publicize the issue and bring the situation to the attention of the public. We strongly urge any interested party to write the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development requesting him to take actions.

The Students' Union sponsored a forum on native education with Chief Dan George, Kahn Tineta Horn and Harold Cardinal.

Thursday, October 14--The Students' Union distributed a pamphlet outlining Council's

position and including a letter to be signed and sent to Jean Chretien.

Students' Union sponsored a benefit concert in SUB with the money going to the people at the Cold Lake Reserve.

Friday, October 15--The Students' Union opened a bank account to deposit the money raised.

Thursday, October 21--The Students' Union sponsored another educational forum and discussion groups on the Indian situation.

A telegram was drawn up and sent to Jean Chretien asking him to come to Alberta to meet the concerned people.

Friday, October 22--The Students' Union sponsored a benefit "Social" with the proceeds going to the Indian cause in northeast Alberta.

Monday, October 25 to Thursday, October 28--The Students' Union education program continued with speakers in high school and university classes. A force of approximately 100 volunteer workers in conjunction with the Students' Union are prepared for further action and educational programs when necessary.

Part of the Students' Union involvement included their decision to circulate a letter of protest to be sent to the Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chretien. A copy of that letter follows; you are welcome to copy it and use it, if you wish.

Honorable Jean Chretien,
Minister of Indian Affairs
And Northern Development,
House of Commons,
OTTAWA 4, ONTARIO.

Dear Sir:

The Indian People of North-eastern Alberta have reached an impasse. They have attempted all legitimate means to bring their problem to focus to have their problem solved, all ending in frustrating failure.

The actions of the Indian people are entirely justified and I fully support their present actions of boycotting the reserve schools. It appears that further and stronger action may be required if you do not act to solve the problems of Indian peoples in Alberta and Canada. If further actions are required, the Indians of Cold Lake, Alberta and Canada have my full support.

Mr. Trudeau has spoken extensively of the "just society" and of "people being involved in the decision making process". From your actions these statements appear to be empty promises and opportunistic rhetoric. I feel it is about time your government practices participatory democracy -- by giving to the Indian people control over their own education.

It is a deplorable situation when funds from your department are spent on "White" schools that allow only 10% of the enrollment to be Indian, and when excrement from a pig farm is allowed to flow into the reserve's water supply, and when white teachers encourage Indian students to drop out so that the class average will remain high.

Mr. Trudeau once said the Indian problems will be settled in the "Forum of the Canadian Public". --If your Department doesn't act soon, you can count on further and stronger action from myself and thousands of other Albertans.

NAME
ADDRESS

... is they won't die ...

I felt strange, you know. Strange, like your first acid trip. Really strange, you know, you can't, you have to experience it for yourself, you know, from a country to a city, and it's entirely different, you know. There's no trees, no freedom. Need money. You feel different You want to go back home, you know, and the devil and angel come up on your shoulder and "Do this, go home," and "Don't go home."

. . . I was so nervous, I was always wishing I was at home. You know, I was all by myself as if there was nobody around.

It makes you feel like a dumb thing. Didn't know how to ride on the buses, didn't even know you're supposed to pull the string to get off, didn't know directions, didn't know streets ran one way, avenues ran another, didn't know the difference, didn't know how the streets went, like there's first, second, third, fourth, and things like that and you just didn't know anything, you're completely green. *Indian High School Student, Edmonton*