

SPECTRUM

First Nations' View

Roots of self-government are taking hold

by Cline Gideon

There has been a very encouraging development in terms of dealing with the issues of Native Aboriginal concerns. From land claims to even the general administration of first Nations, the roots of self-government are taking hold. There is a change occurring, and this change is bringing Native issues to the forefront of public discussion.

For a vast many years, the Native Aboriginal has bitterly complained of the conditions that have occurred and they have experienced as a result of being forced to live a life which is slightly contradictory to self-existence. The ways and means of living that are considered normal (in terms of Native norms) have been altered. For a good many years, we the Natives have become disillusioned with the world we have been forced to live in.

What I have seen is that the smoke is beginning to clear, and that we have now begun to understand in dealing with "the other nation" for the mutual benefit of both.

The issue of the Aboriginal Peoples' is finally come to pass. In recent years, where once issues would be swept under the carpet and ignored, by Native First Nations themselves and the white community also, the public are finally taken notice. Such examples include for instance here in New Brunswick issue of the Red Band First Nation and their claims of "squatters" on their land. Also, the issue that has been plaguing Big Cove First Nation is being addressed. To jump a bit outside the province, the disposition of the Innu community of Davis Inlet and their concerns are being quickly addressed. While there are many issues that are not addressed, recent times have seen a greater proliferation of these

concerns being brought to full attention to the non-native community.

There are perhaps a few factors that can be considered to explain why full attention of Native concerns is strongly being addressed. For one instance, we have seen in the Native First Nations individuals who have made their way into the inroads of the non-Native community and who are attaining strong measures of responsibility and respect. We are now seeing the recognition of Natives in your Judicial Court system, not just within the bottom rung of administrators and lawyers, but also within the level of judgeship, indeed a true accomplishment in terms

of advancement in the recognition and the contribution Native First Nations can bring to non-Native communities. In making note of such contributions, there is more general acceptance in the recognition of the concerns that Natives as a whole are experiencing. We care and are contributing, so perhaps we do deserve more sincere gestures in addressing concerns that face Native First Nations on the whole.

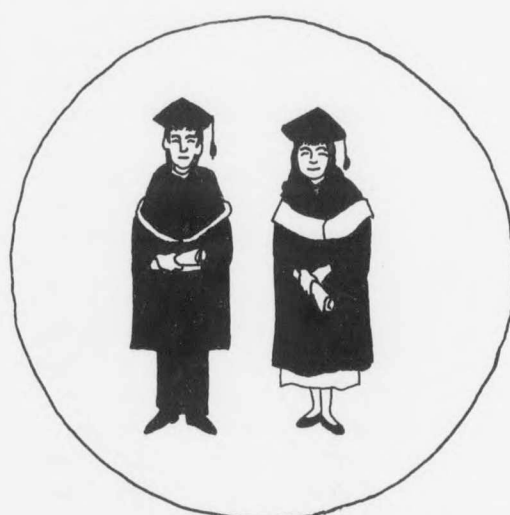
Another factor that can be considered as to why First Nations are being truly dealt with is that currently there is a gradual shift in the way we express our concerns to the non-Native community as a whole. For many years the First Nations have continuously bitterly complained of how our treatment has been handled by the non-Native communities. Today there is another front that has opened up in terms of actually doing something about these complaints. In saying this, I amend that we now have greater awareness in using the institutions that can be found in your administrative framework in society, which include the judicial process. In using these institutions, we are no longer just "pissing in the wind," as the saying goes. We are beginning to be heard in a manner that is more legitimate than just using blockades as a means of gaining this recognition. Then again, the use of blockades should not be negated to a discernible degree, because it is what made the need for alternative measures in addressing concerns of the Native peoples to be looked at.

No one truly benefits when the use of blockades are used to express the anger and frustration of a seemingly helpless situation. But there appeared to be no other recourse that would bring attention more quickly to the forefront in non-Native communities.

In opening up this new front by using the actual administrative process, we are seeking a more legitimate process in seeing that our discontent is being addressed. In doing so, non-natives are accepting this version and are therefore more willing to see that the Native community will at least be more scrutinized.

Another factor that I would like to quickly address which already has been hinted upon is education. For the Native Aboriginal, this is the most important aspect that is in need to be considered. Without

DISILLUSION! Native have become disillusioned with the world they have been forced to live in.



How to Overcome Barriers



How Not to Overcome Barriers

education, none of this would be possible. We would not be able to know how to handle the administrative process that seems to handle every aspect of our lives as a Native people of this land. Without education, we would not have Native Judges who would bring forth greater legitimacy to the cause of Native First Nations. Without education, Native lawyers would not be in place to the degree there is now. Education is important to any culture, and this is no exception to the Native Aboriginal persons throughout this land we call Canada.

All of this is a great benefit to both the Native and Non-Native community. Each is coming together in a greater understanding between us for the greater development as a whole. Don't get me wrong by thinking that everything is all nice and okay between Natives and Non-Natives. This is not necessarily the case. What I do wish to point out is that there has been a dramatic rise in the understanding between us and that there is quite a distance to go. What has been accomplished, which is more recently than at any other time, is something that must be used to further understanding. In Canada, four hundred and sixty odd years is a long time of contact and a lot of "bridges" have been burned. Times have been very tough but do seem to be improving. It is the hope of First Nations that this course continues.

An example of what I believe does need a greater understanding between our two peoples is that we the Native have a different outlook

at how we get things done within our First Nations, and this seems to bring slight digestion between us. Our concept of spirituality (religion) differs just a bit from the non-Native view. Yet this is the way in which we believe how things should be done. Our values in dealing with the environment also deviate just a bit from you the non-Natives. Yet again we feel that is the way things should be done and which is something we have been doing for thousands of years and seemed to experience little difficulty in "getting things done." There are various ways in which we do things that alter slightly from that of the non-Native perspective. This is an area where understanding needs to be placed.

I can only speculate that perhaps there was an ulterior motive when many considered the education of the Native population would lead to the abandonment of customary ways and traditions. Indeed what is occurring is the adjustment we the Natives have to accomplish for a greater accommodation to the non-native community. It is true that Native ways are perhaps unsuited in fully being practiced in today's modern society, but there should be no difficulty in such ways becoming adaptive to this new environment. Unfortunately, here is where the difficulty is.

As a small example of an adaptive way would be the administration of justice in an altered form of self-government in a recognized First Nation. Details do not permit but let me say that because of the size of a First Nation, justice would

I can only speculate that perhaps there was an ulterior motive when many considered the education of the Native population would lead to the abandonment of customary ways and traditions. Indeed what is occurring is the adjustment we the Natives have to accomplish for a greater accommodation to the non-native community.

be handed out for the betterment of the perpetrator, the victim and the community as a whole. The Criminal Justice System in Canada is designed to deal with a vast population in dealing with an equally vast amount of crimes. Due to the size of the system, there develops an impersonal, cold view. Within a First nation, since the population is small and everyone is known to the community, a different approach is perhaps better taken. Thus, developing a Native justice system based on the Canadian justice system would be more prevalent, but having a bit of tinkering to adapt to the Native way of judicial rendering.

Yes, a new front has opened up. But are the days of blockades over? With greater planning, perhaps, but don't go counting your eggs yet, and we will keep our moccasins by our side for just a few more miles.

Wela'lieg.