

Indian housing imp

By ROLAND MORRISON

"To catch up, we need \$5,000,000 for new homes over the next five years," says Anthony Francis, President of the Union of New Brunswick Indians.

In a report released last June, the UNBI scored the "appalling housing conditions" on New Brunswick reserves. The survey costing \$28,000, was funded by CMHC and conducted entirely by Indians. Although sorely lacking in professional research methods and techniques, the survey did serve to illuminate existing conditions on New Brunswick reserves.

"The government started from scratch in the 1950's," said Mr. Francis, in a Brunswick interview. "It was only then that the government began to look at its responsibilities seriously. There was no provision for housing in Indian Affairs policy before. That is why there is such a need now. We have to catch up!"

According to the survey, 513 new homes will be required during the next 5 years. 192 of them in 1972-73. Existing homes are seriously overcrowded, often with two families living in a house of less than 800 square feet living space. To make matters worse, it was found that between 35 and 50 percent of existing homes are in need of major repairs.

In Mr. Francis' words, the survey report received "fair" treatment in the press, but had "no real impact" on the public or the government.

"The government says it can only give so much money and that's it. There is no indication that the government is going to increase the budget on housing. They tell us: 'Since we can only give you half, go somewhere else - to CMHC - and borrow the balance'."

However, Mr. Francis finds this advice particularly unfeasible. He noted that it would be difficult for Indians to pay back loans from CMHC.

"When a town borrows money from Central Mortgage and Housing to build homes for the poor, it can pay the loan back from its taxes," he explained, "But when a band borrows money, it does not have taxes to pay it back. Under the Indian Act, Indians have special status and don't pay taxes. So, that makes it difficult for the chiefs to take the responsibility of borrowing, especially in view of the high unemployment on reserves (which reaches 90 percent at times)."

"Borrowing makes housing cost a lot more," he continued. "When you pay back the loan you are paying almost twice as much as you borrowed. If we got the money from the government right away, we could build 100 homes instead of 50 for the same amount of money."

Last year, the government, as represented by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, spent over \$200 million in support of Indian Programs. \$14 million of that was earmarked for housing. This money is then allotted to the different

reserves, which draw up their own budgets according to their needs, schools, sewage disposal, roads, housing, recreation, etc. Band budgets have been getting cut heavily, receiving 3 or 4 houses when they budget for 15.

Mr. Francis also discussed the danger of Indians falling into a "perpetual welfare" situation in regards to government welfare handouts.

"The government welfare will allow so much for rent, but this would be perpetual welfare," he said. "Now there is incentive with home ownership. Only 50 percent of an Indian's income is considered as income, so he can work without losing his welfare money. But if all the money were paid back by welfare, there would be no incentive."

"The Indians were totally neglected from 1867 to 1950. The Indian population in Acadia was 15,000 in 1741, but due to neglect, the expropriation of Indian lands and hunting rights, this dropped to 1400 in 1841. The Indian population in New Brunswick is now up to 4500."

"But the long years of neglect has led to frustration. Indians were put on reserves and couldn't participate in the governing of Canada. Their means of subsistence were cut off, and nothing was done about it. Indians today suffer from alienation due to the public image of an Indian. There is a loss of self-identity, a lack of self-image. An Indian has an identity conflict - he is anti-system, anti-everything."



"The government has to really look at the important needs and economic conditions on the reserves," he continued. "They have to spend more money for housing, and incorporate other programs such as the Local Initiatives Program, and the Work Opportunities program. Through the Economic Development Program pilot projects should be started in some Indian Communities. Training programs should be begun by Canada Manpower. If we had the trained people, we could use the money for materials rather than labour. That way, we could build more houses on the same amount of money. We could get money from LIP if we had the materials."

Mr. Francis gave reasons why the government must undertake the above measures.

"This is really evident - an Indian is sensitive when referred to as an Indian. If he appreciated his ancestry, you wouldn't get that reaction. The Cultural Education Centre is trying to teach society the heritage of the Indian. Movies have ruined the concept of an Indian."

"An Indian's mentality changes when he lives in a good home. The acceptance of certain conditions are passed on from generation to generation. A better mentality develops."

Mr. Francis feels that with better housing and social conditions, Indians will be more able to help themselves. Although the opportunity for educational advancement does exist, it is virtually denied to Indians because of their low standard of living. Young Indians