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The Buckskin Curtain

The Indian-Problem Problem

The history of Canada's Indians is a shameful chronicle of the white man's disinterest, his deliberate trampling of Indian rights and his repeated betrayal of our trust. Generations of Indians have grown up behind a buckskin curtain of indifference, ignorance and, all too often, plain bigotry. Now, at a time when our fellow Canadians consider the promise of the Just Society, once more the Indians of Canada are betrayed by a programme which offers nothing better than cultural genocide.

The new Indian policy promulgated by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's government, under the auspices of the Honourable Jean Chrétien, minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and Deputy Minister John A. MacDonald, and presented in June 1969 is a thinly disguised programme of extermination through assimilation. For the Indian to survive, says the government in effect, he must become a good little brown white man. The Americans to the south of us used to have a saying: "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." The MacDonald-Chrétien doctrine would amend this but slightly to, "The only good Indian is a non-Indian."

The federal government, instead of acknowledging its legal and moral responsibilities to the Indians of Canada and honouring the treaties that the Indians signed in good faith, now proposes to wash its hands of Indians entirely, passing the buck to the provincial governments.

Small wonder that in 1969, in the one hundred and second year of Canadian confederation, the native people of Canada look back on generations of accumulated frustration under conditions which can only be described as colonial, brutal and tyrannical, and look to the future with the gravest of doubts.

Torrents of words have been spoken and written about Indians since the arrival of the white man on the North American continent. Endless columns of statistics have been compiled. Countless programmes have been prepared for Indians by non-Indians. Faced with society's general indifference and a massive accumulation of misdirected, often insincere efforts, the greatest mistake the Indian has made has been to remain so long silent.

As an Indian writing about a situation I am living and experiencing in common with thousands of our people it is my hope that this book will open the eyes of the Canadian public to its shame. In these pages I hope to cut through bureaucratic doubletalk to show what it means to be an Indian in Canada. I intend to document the betrayals of our trust, to show step by step how a dictatorial bureaucracy has eroded our rights, atrophied our culture and robbed us of simple human dignity. I will expose the ignorance and bigotry that has impeded our progress, the eighty years of educational neglect that have hobbled our young people for generations, the gutless politicians who have knowingly watched us sink in the quicksands of apathy and despair and have failed to extend a hand.

I hope to point a path to radical change that will admit the Indian with restored pride to his rightful place in the Canadian heritage, that will enable the Indian in Canada at long last to realize his dreams and aspirations and find his place in Canadian society. I will challenge our fellow Canadians to help us; I will warn them of the alternatives.

I challenge the Honourable Mr. Trudeau and the Honourable Mr. Chrétien to reexamine their unfortunate policy, to offer the Indians of Canada hope instead of despair, freedom instead of frustration, life in the Just Society instead of cultural annihilation.

It sometimes seems to Indians that Canada shows more interest in preserving its rare whooping cranes than its Indians. And Canada, the Indian notes, does not ask its cranes to become Canada geese. It just wants to preserve them as whooping cranes. Indians hold no grudge against the big, beautiful, nearly extinct birds, but we would like to know how they managed their deal. Whooping cranes can remain whooping cranes, but Indians are to become brown white men. The contrast in the situation is an insult to our people. Indians have aspirations, hopes and dreams, but becoming white men is not one of them.

Indifference? Indians have witnessed the growing concern of Canadians over racial strife in the United States. We have watched the justifiably indignant reaction of fellow Canadians to the horrors of starvation

in Biafra. Television has brought into our homes the sad plight of the Vietnamese, has intensified the concern of Canadians about the role of our neighbour country in the brutal inhumanity of war. The Unitarian Service Committee reminds us of the starving conditions of hundreds of thousands of Asians. Canadian urbanites have walked blisters on their feet and fat off their rumps to raise money for underdeveloped countries outside Canada.

We do not question the concern of Canadians about such problems. We do question how sincere or how deep such concern may be when Canadians ignore the plight of the Indian or Métis or Eskimo in their own country. There is little knowledge of native circumstances in Canada and even less interest. To the native one fact is apparent—the average Canadian does not give a damn.

The facts are available, dutifully compiled and clucked over by a handful of government civil servants year after year. Over half the Indians of Canada are jobless year after year. Thousands upon thousands of native people live in housing which would be condemned in any advanced society on the globe. Much of the housing has no inside plumbing, no running water, no electricity. A high percentage of the native peoples of Canada never get off welfare. This is the way it is, not in Asia or Africa but here in Canada. The facts are available; a Sunday drive to the nearest reserve will confirm them as shocking reality.

Bigotry? The problem grows worse, not better. A survey by the Canadian Corrections Association, entitled *Indians and the Law*, reveals some of the problems that the native person faces in the area of prejudice and discrimination. The survey reports bluntly: "Underlying all problems associated with Indians and Eskimo in this country are the prejudice and discrimination they meet in the attitudes of non-Indians. The result is a conviction on the part of the Indians and Eskimo that they are not really part of the dominant Canadian society and that their efforts to better themselves will fail because they do not have an even chance."

Probably the most perceptive statement of the report observes: "Few non-Indians will admit to feelings of prejudice against the Indian and Eskimo people because such views are no longer acceptable, but the façade often vanishes when problems arise."

Many Canadians, however, have always claimed and continue to assert that Canada has little racial difficulty. Statements of this nature are just so much uninformed nonsense.

In any area where there is a concentration of native people there exists

racial tension. Urban centres with their multiplicity of attractions and opportunities are drawing more and more natives who come in hope and stay in misery. These migrants, with little financial security, all too often with insufficient job training and nearly always with terribly inadequate knowledge of white mores, inevitably jam into ghettos, increasing not only their own problems but those of the city. The people of the city answer with bigotry, wrongly attributing the problem to colour or race rather than to any inadequacy of opportunity and social response.

As Indian people attempt to organize and as Indian leaders become more vocal and articulate, the shades of bigotry which now appear in pastel will show up in more vivid colours. People who are tolerant of a problem which hasn't touched them are put to the test when the problem moves next door.

As an ethnocentric society, the Canadian non-Indian society puts its own peer group at the centre of all things desirable and rates all other cultures accordingly. It is an assumption, quite often becoming a conviction, that the values, the ways of life, the whole culture of one's own group must be superior to those of others. Tell a person long enough and often enough that he is inferior, and likely he will eventually accept the false image you thrust upon him.

An Indian leader in the Northwest Territories, asked why his people couldn't do a certain job for themselves, wisely and sadly observed, "They could, but they have been told for so long by the white man that they can't that now they don't think they can." Indians long have been victims of this sort of conscious and unconscious downgrading pressure from the non-Indian.

Ignorance? It thrives on the incestuous mating of indifference and bigotry and in turn breeds more of the same. Ignorance is irretrievably locked in with prejudice. How often have you heard a white man say, "Indians are lousy workers," or, "Indians are shiftless" or "dirty" or "lazy," or, "Indians are drunken bums"? I have seen in numerous cities across the country non-Indians engaged in excessive drinking, making drunken fools of themselves. In these circumstances, what do you hear? "Well, isn't he having a ball," or "He's just letting his hair down," or, perhaps, "Boy, isn't he a real swinger!" Let native people be seen in similar conditions and what do you get? The comments are more in the nature of epithets: "Worthless drunks!" or "Drunken bums!"

This double standard has stereotyped the native people as a whole as people who can't handle liquor. More damaging is the fact that similar

double standards are applied to nearly every aspect of native life. Typically, the Indians-can't-hold-their-liquor theory is inexcusably used by church groups or church leaders to try to force governments to accept the churches' views on liquor. And employers, like the churches, use this stereotype as a lever against government enforcement of fair employment standards. Let a white man get drunk and miss a day of work . . . his boss may fire him, but he gets another white man for the job. He doesn't say, "All white workers are drunken bums and too shiftless to hold a job." If the Indian misses a day, the entire race is condemned and categorized as no good; the next worker hired is not likely to be an Indian.

If more of these church groups, more of these employers and more of the other pressure groups who make opportune use of this handy double standard were honest with themselves and with government, they would quit using the Indian as an excuse to foist their own beliefs on the rest of society.

It can be argued that ignorance in some segments of society is understandable if not excusable, but ignorance at higher levels is neither. Political leaders must have, at the very least, a working knowledge of the particular constituencies they represent. They must know the people who elected them to represent their viewpoints; they must know the problems, the needs, the desires of "their" people. Particularly is this true when a politician is named to higher office, for example, a ministry.

Ministers of the crown have a large bureaucracy available to inform, advise and help them in the discharge of their responsibilities. They have almost endless resources upon which to draw. Nor are they dependent entirely upon such official and hired help. Their constituents also, for the most part, have resources. They have their own organizations or lobbies; they may have financial resources which can be utilized and will most often be respected. They have the means and the talent to present to the minister their own viewpoints and they can bring sufficient pressure to make certain "their" minister or "their" representative listens. Furthermore, the news media, because of their responsibility to look at both sides of the picture and to bring balanced views to bear on current problems, help elected representatives of the people discharge their duties properly and in an informed manner.

All of this theoretically works fine as a system of checks and balances, providing the necessary background knowledge and understanding of a situation to ensure proper and fair legislation . . . except that none of the above applies to Indians in Canada.

Throughout the hundreds of years of the Indian-government relationship, political leaders responsible for matters relating to Indians have been outstanding in their ignorance of the native people and remarkable in their insensitivity to the needs and aspirations of the Indians in Canada. More often than not, government people simply do not know what they are doing, and if they show any evidence of caring, it usually is in direct proportion to political pressure and political expediency at the time.

The question of paramount importance in the minds of successive ministers responsible for Indian Affairs appears to have been and to remain the defence of the gross ineptitude of their department. Any attempt to uncover the actual state of affairs and do the necessary housecleaning appears to have been either beyond them or of no interest to them.

Two factors play a part in the seemingly endless state of ignorance displayed by most federal politicians about native people. Too many are content to close their minds to any but the stereotype images so easy to pick up in Canada. They make little or no effort to go to the people and find out firsthand what is really happening. Secondly, until very recently, the question of Indians had never been a major political issue. The people of Canada simply have not been moved by the problem. Consequently, members of Parliament haven't felt it worth their time to investigate the Indian situation.

Historically, the question of Indians has been one raised by politicians for some purely ulterior motive, perhaps to create an image of social awareness or compassion. The concern has been passing, viable only when the image was politically attractive, usually forgotten as soon as the votes were counted or the winds of change blew from another quarter.

Most politicians and, as far as that goes, most Canadians, tend to plead ignorance as a defence for the inexcusable treatment of the native people of this country. One should keep in mind that ignorance is not acceptable in law as a defence, even in the case of a violated local ordinance, nor is it acceptable in international courts passing judgment on crimes against humanity.

However, even more reprehensible than the man who does not act because he is ignorant is the man who *does* know the situation but fails to act. I can only label this type of performance *gutless*. When I talk of a gutless person, I am talking about a human being who does not have the courage to try to change an unjust situation. I call gutless a person, who, rather than change an indefensible state of affairs, tries to sweep the

mess under a rug. I call gutless the politician who stalls, procrastinates and tries to perpetuate the antiquated systems and attitudes which have produced injustice, in order to try to maintain his own positive image. When I look at the existing situation among the natives of Canada, I cannot help but assume we must have a hell of a lot of gutless politicians in this country.

In 1969 it is true that there are some notable exceptions on the political scene: Robert Andras, minister responsible for Housing; Martin O'Connell, a Liberal backbencher from Toronto and a member of the House Standing Committee on Indian Affairs; Gerald Baldwin, a Conservative member from Peace River and Frank Howard, the New Democratic party member from British Columbia. While a few men like these have worked to build up Indian competence and leadership qualities, many more through the years have contributed to a disastrous and calculated programme of leadership destruction.

The white man's government has allowed (worse, urged) its representatives to usurp from Indian peoples our right to make our own decisions and our authority to implement the goals we have set for ourselves. In fact, the real power, the decision-making process and the policy-implementing group, has always resided in Ottawa, in the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. To ensure the complete disorganization of native peoples, Indian leadership over the past years and yet today has been discredited and destroyed. Where this was not possible, the bureaucrats have maintained the upper hand by subjecting durable native leaders to endless exercises in futility, to repeated, pointless reorganizations, to endless barrages of verbal diarrhoea promising never-coming changes.

Indeed, the real tanners of hides for the Buckskin Curtain are these self-same bureaucrats. To gain insight into the Indian problem, a basic understanding of the group of people known as bureaucrats, civil servants or mandarins working in the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (formerly the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration) is necessary.

These faceless people in Ottawa, a comparatively small group, perpetually virtually unknown, have sat at their desks eight hours a day, five days a week, for over a century, and decided just about everything that will ever happen to a Canadian Indian. They have laid down the policy, the rules, the regulations on all matters affecting native peoples. They have decided where our sons will go to school, near home or hopelessly

far from home; they have decided what houses will be built on what reserves for what Indians and whether they may have inside or outside toilets; they have decided what types of social or economic development will take place and where and how it will be controlled. If you are a treaty Indian, you've never made a move without these guys, these bureaucrats, these civil servants at their desks in their new office tower in Ottawa saying "yes" . . . or "no."

And, you know something? It would almost be funny if it weren't so pathetic. In the latter part of 1968, a government official suggested publicly that the mandarins in Ottawa would probably not even recognize an Indian if they met one on the street.

These are the people who make the decisions, the policies, the plans and programmes by which we live, decisions made in almost total isolation from the Indians in Canada. Their ignorance of the people whose lives and destinies they so routinely control perpetuates the stereotype image they have developed of the native people.

Through generations of justifying their positions to the Canadian public and to Canada's political leaders, the bureaucrats within the department have come to believe their own propaganda. They have fostered an image of Indians as a helpless people, an incompetent people and an apathetic people in order to increase their own importance and to stress the need for their own continued presence.

Most of their action stems from their naïveté and a genuine belief that their solutions are necessary to ensure the survival of Indians. For the most part they are not really evil men. They have evolved no vicious plots intentionally to subjugate the Indian people. The situation for the Indian people, as bad as it is, has resulted largely from good intentions, however perverted, of civil servants within the Department of Indian Affairs. However, one cannot forget the direction usually taken by roads paved with nothing but good intentions.

Small wonder that the report on *Indians and the Law* notes: "Many non-Indians believe that nothing better can be expected from the descendants of Canada's original people, and many Indians and Eskimo oblige by acting in a way that confirms this expectation."

I have talked with many Indian people. I have had the opportunity to discuss our situation as a people with affluent Indians who have it made and with Indians living in the worst state of deprivation. I have met my fellow Indians of all generations, in all walks of life and from nearly every part of Canada.

Always I find that as Indian people, we share hopes for a better Canada, a better future and a better deal. We share hopes that Canadian society will accept us as we are and will listen to what we have to say.

One of the most difficult challenges our people face comes with this question of acceptance by non-Indian society. Certainly it means that on both sides we must change misconceptions about each other. It means that we must have the intelligence and the courage to set aside the old stereotypes on both sides. It means that we must change negative attitudes, shrug off bigotry, overcome the accumulated effects of generations of isolation from each other. It means honest-to-God intellectual and emotional effort by Indians and non-Indians.

Acceptance of the Indian in non-Indian society must mean acceptance as an individual in his own right, as a fellow human being. I emphasize the need for acceptance on an individual or personal basis. As members of a minority group we sometimes are bemused by the attitude of non-Indian people who meet us. Sometimes we literally can see the expression on their faces saying, "How do I approach this Indian? Can I go over and say hello? Will he be offended if I do this or say that? How should I act?" No problem, really. Be yourself. If you are a snob, you aren't going to make it with us anyhow. If you are a phoney, we're going to sense it. If you are okay, then there will be no problem. Just don't try to fake it. Be yourself. Now and then Indians run into a situation where a non-Indian makes his presence obnoxious by attempting to show that he feels you are no different than he is. He may think this is a great compliment, but you know damned well you *are* different from him—and, as often as not, you are glad of it.

Is it, then, too much to ask that we be accepted by the larger Canadian society as individuals in our own right, who can and will work with members of that larger society without first being required to become brown white men or white-washed brown men?

Talking and listening have been one-way streets with white men and Indians. Until very recently white men have expected Indians to do all the listening. Indians, on the other hand, have felt that the white man just couldn't shut up long enough to listen. For many years now our people have talked about what concerned them most, have suggested solutions to our problems as we see them, have talked generally about our hopes for a better future. Some have talked articulately and with eloquence, some less lucidly; some have spoken with great intensity and emotion, others with objectivity and almost passively. But all talk,

brilliant or dull, visionary or cautiously realistic, remains futile when the people you talk to simply won't listen. We want the white man to shut up and listen to us, really listen for a change. Some Canadians listen but they wish to hear Indians say only what white people want to hear. They like to hear an Indian tell them what a good job government is doing and how the lowly Indian would have vanished if not for the white man's help. Such people quit listening when an Indian tries to tell them the hard facts of Indian life in Canada.

The Indian people are now impatient with the verbal games that have been played. We want the beginnings of a real and purposeful dialogue with non-Indian people and government representatives in order to get on with the business of solving some of the most basic difficulties that we face. When we enter into a dialogue, we wish to have the respect and the courtesy of the non-Indian society in their recognition that we are talking sense, that we have the intelligence and capacity to judge for ourselves what is good or bad for us. When we offer suggestions, we expect those suggestions to be given the attention they deserve, instead of the usual brush-off. Are you familiar with that brush-off? It goes, "Well, boys, what you have to say is good and you must be commended for the intelligence you have shown through your extremely good presentation," and, subsequently, the inevitable, "but we know your problems and what should be done, and we're certain that you will be pleased with our carefully considered decisions."

We want to be heard as reasonable, thinking people, able to identify with our own problems and to present rational solutions. We want to be treated as human beings with the dignity and equality we feel is our right. We ask the non-Indian society to wake up to things the way they are, to see us as a people with needs, emotions and untapped potential. These are the hopes of the present generation of Indian leaders. Surely these cannot be unreasonable hopes. They must not be.

We listen when Canadian political leaders talk endlessly about strength in diversity for Canada, but we understand they are talking primarily about the French Canadian fact in Canada. Canadian Indians feel, along with other minorities, that there is a purpose and a place for us in a Canada which accepts and encourages diversified human resources. We like the idea of a Canada where all cultures are encouraged to develop in harmony with one another, to become part of the great mosaic. We are impatient for the day when other Canadians will accord the Indian the recognition implied in this vision of Canada.

The vast majority of our people are committed to the concept of Canadian unity and to the concept of participation in that unity. The Indians of Canada surely have as great a commitment to Canada, if not a greater one, than even the most patriotic-sounding political leaders. More truly than it can be said of anyone else, it is upon this land that our heritage, our past and our identity originates. Our commitment to Canada exists because of our belief that we have a responsibility to do all we can to ensure that our country is a nation with which we can proudly identify.

To fulfill our dreams for participation in the greatness of Canada, we must be able to contribute to Canada. We invite our white brothers to realize and acknowledge that the Indian in Canada has already made a considerable contribution to the greatness of our country, that the Indian has played a significant role in Canadian history. Our people look on with concern when the Canadian government talks about "the two foundling peoples" without giving recognition to the role played by the Indian even before the founding of a nation-state known as Canada.

However, Canada's Indians look to the future as the greatest period for participation. Our contribution will be based upon what we are as a people, upon what, as a culture, Indian society will add to the mosaic and upon what we can accomplish as individuals to add to our country's total potential.

Here there is a lack, glaringly obvious. Our people lack the skills through which we might best contribute as individuals. If the Indian receives no training as a doctor then he cannot add to Canada's potential in medical advances. If he does not acquire the skills of a politician, he cannot hope to advance Canada politically. The Indian people must realize their greatest contributions to Canada's potential through whatever skills they may be able to add to Canada's pool of know-how. This is why Indians include in their aspirations better training in skills at all working levels, from professional to technical, to make it possible for each of us to work with our fellow Canadians so that the sum total of our efforts as Canadians results in the growth and expansion of the land we call our home.

No one realizes better than the Indian that the road ahead is long and hard going. There exist more than two thousand reserves across Canada, situated in every geographical area of our immense country, some actually within the boundaries of major cities (in Vancouver, Winnipeg and

Toronto), some deep in the underdeveloped northern wildernesses, many isolated not only from the mainstream of society but from one another. The needs and the problems of Indians living in such diverse circumstances vary widely and, of course, the environment influences greatly their desires and ambitions.

The language barrier has isolated our people as truly as the geographical barrier. There are eleven different major language groups among the Indians of Canada with scores of dialects changing from band to band. Only recently has English become universal enough among Indians to serve as a medium of communication. And, even today, the most articulate (in English) Indian will confess readily that he still feels more at home in his mother tongue.

Nationwide Indian unity represents a dream long held by Indian leaders well aware of the divisive influence of the emphasis upon individual bands and tribes. Only recently, with the growth of strong provincial organizations in turn leading to the creation for the first time of a viable national organization, the National Indian Brotherhood, has this dream shown signs of realization. When our people begin to call themselves Indians instead of Crees or Saulteaux or Mohawks, when intertribal cooperation no longer allows the government to threaten our individual treaties, then we will have the strength of unity, the power to help make some of our other dreams come true.

Canada is an enormous country. Even within a single province such as Alberta, conditions vary so widely from reserve to reserve that common needs, aspirations and goals that can be attributed to the entire Indian people are often difficult to determine.

Perhaps our most persistent dreams stem from our most insistent reality—poverty—the one reality most Indians share. Perhaps because the Indian people face the most difficult and demoralizing situation in Canada, our aspirations are the more intense. We face the greatest challenge and, at the same time, the greatest threat.

Indians gladly accept the challenge—to become participating Canadians, to take a meaningful place in the mainstream of Canadian society. But we remain acutely aware of the threat—the loss of our Indian identity, our place as distinct, identifiable Canadians.

However idealistic some Indian dreams may be, there remain everyday hopes that come right down to earth. Indians are like anyone else. We look around and see a very affluent society. Just like our non-Indian neighbours, we want a share, a new car, a well-built home, television.

These represent surface things, but it hurts deeply to see the affluence of our country and not be allowed to benefit from it. We want better education, a better chance for our children and the option to choose our own pathway in life. If we are to be part of the Canadian mosaic, then we want to be colourful red tiles, taking our place where red is both needed and appreciated.

Our people wish to become involved in all aspects of the professional community, but how many Indian doctors, Indian lawyers, Indian community planners, Indian engineers, artist, writers, professors do you know in Canada? While we see the white society training its young people for life in the professional and technological world of the space age, we find the government attempting to train our people in skills that have not been required since the Industrial Revolution.

If we as a people are to assume a purposeful role in our own lives, if we are to become truly involved in today's and tomorrow's society, then we must be given the opportunity of controlling our own future. Indians resent eternal overprotection. How can we take our place in the world, ever hope to make the right choices, if we are denied the opportunity to choose at every remote chance of peril? Have no white men ever failed? Have no white men ever risen above failure, the wiser for the experience?

An aspiration that seems to puzzle and disturb the white man remains common to every Indian I have ever talked to who is on welfare. This aspiration is simply to get off relief. You'll never find a prouder Indian than one who can say, "I've never been on welfare." The fact that such a high percentage of Indians are on welfare at any given moment only sharpens the point. Indians realize that social assistance is part of the white man's world, that many white families must accept welfare. Indians accept the fact that now and then circumstances may dictate to any man that he must accept temporary help in clothing and feeding his family but, and this seems to surprise the white man, the Indian by nature finds acceptance of welfare demeaning. It is not so much the giving as the implication. When that man looks at you as he hands over the check and you reach for it, you know what his look means. It means that you aren't man enough to make your own living; it means that you aren't man enough to feed and clothe and house your own wife and children. That's when an Indian hates welfare. That's why a common dream among Indians coast to coast and border to pole is to get off welfare.

We want to get involved, but we have had only a gutful of vague philosophical government commitments to give us opportunities for involvement. To us involvement remains meaningless without the money to make it work. It's just so much Ottawa doubletalk to tell us to go ahead on any programme without proper provision for the financial, human and physical resources that are required. Involvement must mean enough money to enable Indian people to hire the professional consultants and experts necessary, without regard as to whether they are red, white or yellow. It means money to buy equipment and facilities and it means access to years and years of accumulated research documents buried deep in dusty files in the Indian Affairs offices. Only when the government is willing to back up its lip service to the ideal of Indian involvement with the necessary resources will we be able to talk in terms of a meaningful role for Indians in charting a course for our future. Until then, all statements by the federal government about involving Indians are hypothetical exercises, irrelevant, academic and utterly useless to the Indian.

We have charted the difficulties ahead; we know the obstacles. No matter how concerted an effort we make, we realize that many problems will fall only to combined Indian and non-Indian assault. We point out that to begin, some problems must be faced up to as government responsibilities.

One such major problem arises from the refusal of our present Canadian government in its most recent white paper, and of Canadian governments in the past, to honour commitments for treaties signed with the Indians. Coupled closely with this is the unwillingness of successive governments to recognize the aboriginal rights of our people.

Government after government has, in some way or another, vaguely committed itself to native rights but no government, including and particularly the one in power today, has yet committed itself to the simple honesty of fulfilling its obligations to our people as outlined in the treaties. I will deal more fully with the treaty problem in a later chapter, but it can be noted here that as far as the Indians are concerned, there is not one treaty that has not been broken by the white man, not one treaty fulfilled.

Positive steps by the government to fulfill its treaty obligations represent one aspiration common to all Indians. It was for this reason that our people were encouraged by Prime Minister Trudeau's call for the creation of the Just Society. This brief, dazzling flare of hope, however,

quickly fizzled when Mr. Trudeau publicly announced that the federal government was not prepared to guarantee aboriginal rights and that the Canadian government considered the Indian treaties an anomaly not to be tolerated in the Just Society.

We will not trust the government with our futures any longer. Now they must listen to and learn from us.

When the Curtain Comes Down

Cultural Renaissance or Civil Disorder?

The Indian has reached the end of an era. The things that we hold sacred, the things that we believe in have been repudiated by the federal government. But we will not be silenced again, left behind to be absorbed conveniently into the wretched fringes of a society that institutionalizes wretchedness. The Buckskin Curtain is coming down.

The Indian, and with him the larger Canadian society, faces two alternatives—a future in which the Indian may realize his potential through the provision of the essential resources which are rightfully his, or a future where frustrations are deepened by a continued state of deprivation leading to chaos and civil disorder.

Many factors, some of them still beyond his control, will influence the Indian's choice. His choice will not be an answer to the question of who he is; that can never change. Rather, his choice will lie in how he decides to protect and build his sense of identity; his choice hinges upon his definition of the role he will play in modern society.

I will outline the steps I feel are necessary before the Indian can begin to develop his full potential, the action needed to solve the many problems the Indians of Canada face.

Such action can come only through effective strengthening of existing Indian organizations. The first step is the provision of the resources needed to enable the National Indian Brotherhood to become an effective coordinating body, so that it may provide its member organizations with a national voice. The second step is the creation of strong and viable provincial organizations across the land.

Simultaneously, and coordinated with the strengthening of Indian organizations from national to local levels, the Indian must initiate

action on four vital fronts: federal government recognition of all Indian rights must be secured; new concepts in education which can bridge the gap between our people and modern society must be found and introduced; restructured social institutions based on the community itself must be fashioned and broadly based economic development, sufficient to free the Indian at last from his subservient role, must be managed.

Within the next five years the Department of Indian Affairs is to be abolished. That is the one welcome aspect of the new government policy, but from a practical point of view, some interim body will have to be created. The duties and responsibilities of the department will be passed on to other federal agencies, and from past Indian experience, we know that all government departments have a tendency to pass the buck from one to another. To meet this prospect, the National Indian Brotherhood can play the role of a human resources authority, coordinating the services offered to the Indian by the many federal departments. This role would save the Indian many headaches and aid him in all his dealings with the federal government. At the same time the brotherhood would be in a position to help the various government agencies establish priorities in relation to the needs of the Indians of Canada.

Because of its political structure, the Indian people are assured of continuing control over the activities of the National Indian Brotherhood. This enables the Indians of Canada to participate in the democratic process and assures them an active role in the broad workings of government. In practical terms, this may be the closest the Indians of Canada can come to achieving Prime Minister Trudeau's concept of participatory democracy.

The tough, pragmatic problem solving must take place at the provincial and local levels, and this is the reason provincial Indian organizations must be made as strong as possible. The nature of these primary organizations necessarily must be political. Auxiliary organizations also can be created to work in close harness with the political bodies, to carry the task of concentrating Indian efforts on economic problems and solutions. Such auxiliary organizations can serve effectively in the fields of research and development, but the major provincial organizations must be political, because only through political vehicles can the Indian people express their needs and create pressure for their programmes.

One new role that Indian organizations must play lies in the area of restoring and revitalizing a sense of direction, a sense of purpose and a sense of being. The white man in the last century has effectively killed

the sense of worth in the Indian. Many factors, some of which I have dealt with in earlier chapters, have been responsible for the psychological and spiritual crisis of the Indian. The political organization must be the core of an effort to redefine the word *Indian* in such a way that our people can begin to develop a positive sense of identity.

Perhaps over the long term the most important responsibility the local organization must assume is the creation of a new order of leadership. This must be a leadership that will know and be able to relate positively to the traditions of the past, to the culture of our people and at the same time be tuned into life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Above all, this must be a leadership totally committed to the Indian peoples. It must be a leadership that cannot be corrupted or bought off by those who would support the status quo so that they may continue their stagnating and stifling hold on our people.

The Indian must see his provincial organization in a new perspective. There must be a consolidation of all the scattered, ineffective local organizations into strong provincial, political bodies. In order for this to happen, present leaders must reassess seriously their positions and their motives in occupying them. They must learn to put the interest of their people above their own personal needs and desires. This is happening, but the process has not yet been completed. Consequently, forces of the federal government in too many instances still are able to divide our people by skillful catering to the psychological needs of some of them. Until all our leaders have learned to subordinate personal ambition to their peoples' wishes, the Indians of Canada will remain weak and divided.

The new generation of Indians looks to its leaders for guidance, for example and for a sense of purpose. No more vital responsibility for the new leadership of our provincial organizations can be imagined.

For the scattered and isolated reserves which can be found in every province, the Indian organizations must work to create a sense of brotherhood to help weld these communities together into dynamic, growing forces that can participate in their twentieth-century environment. In the process of creating a new leadership, the provincial organizations must help these divided, forgotten communities find a common identity.

The Indian people of Canada must assume new confidence. There must be a rebirth of the Indian, free, proud, his own man, the equal of his fellow Canadian. Some naïvely believe that true equality will come to the Indian by dispensation from some outside force. It is not within

the power of any outside force, be it the prime minister or any minister of the crown, to command equality. In twentieth-century Canada, equality comes only from economic strength, political power, good organization and through the pride and confidence of a people.

As long as the Indian does not have a positive image of himself, no Canadian, no human being will have a positive image of him and no one will ever respect him. There can be no equality as long as the dignity of the Indian is not respected. Today, most Canadians are either indifferent to Indians or hate them or pity them. The worst of the three is the man who pities the Indian, for he denies the object of his pity the opportunity to be a man. Canadian society will stop pitying the Indian and respect him only when the Indian has gained economic, political or organizational strength. A man who believes Canadian society will grant equality to the Indian because of its sense of Christian responsibility or its adherence to Christian beliefs or because of its obeisance to any concept of human rights common to all men, believes in myths. The Canadian society, self-righteously proclaiming itself just and civilized, has not extended equality to the Indian over the past century, and there is no reason to believe, expect or hope that it will change its spots over the next century if the Indian stays weak.

As the Indians of Canada are working to strengthen their organizations, they must initiate forward movement on other levels.

The Indian must have from the federal government immediate recognition of all Indian rights for the reestablishment, review and renewal of all existing Indian treaties. The negotiations for this must be undertaken in a new and different spirit by both sides. The treaties must be maintained. The treaties must be reinterpreted in light of needs that exist today. Such interpretation and application of the treaties by the Canadian government will help bring all generations of Indians together with a common sense of positive purpose. This is not a concept that should be strange to the government. The treaties differ little from the way the government deals with corporations or corporate bodies, and for that matter all segments of Canadian society, except Indians and possibly the poor of Canada.

Apparently, the government has been unable or unwilling to understand the importance of this concept to the Indians. The treaties, or the concept of Indian rights, must be respected, for they form a major factor in the question of Indian identity. The Indian simply cannot afford to allow the government to renege on its obligations because, if he does, he

commits cultural suicide. This is the reason for the position adopted by the Indian people ... that their rights are not and cannot be negotiable.

Almost equally important is the area of education. Here, too, both sides must move forward into new concepts. The institution of education is largely a cultural phenomenon. Since the introduction of formal white education to the Indians of Canada, their own original educational processes have either been shunted completely aside or discouraged. The only purpose in educating the Indian has been to create little brown white men, not what it should have been, to help develop the human being or to equip him for life in a new environment.

A new look must be given, then, to the fundamental purpose of educating the Indian. It is not enough for the government to promise it will change the content of history books more truly to tell the Indian story. In comparison to the real purpose of education, this is an almost frivolous approach. Of course we would like the falsehoods deleted and Indians characterized more truthfully in what the youth of Canada is taught, but Indians are much more interested in and must approach education with completely new ideas. Indian leaders must be given the opportunity to see and study the educational processes of different peoples in different countries. Only in this way can they help to develop a new conceptual framework related to education and to the solving of their own social problems.

I believe that different forms of education are both possible and available. The majority of our people do not have the opportunity to benefit from existing provincial institutions of education, especially those at the postsecondary level. Few of our people have sufficient academic background to make proper use of the technological schools, trade schools, colleges or universities. Even if they did, there would still be a need for some new form of education or institution that would help them develop a living, dynamic culture. For education to mean anything to our people a new kind of institution or process to bridge the gap between where we stand now and the available postsecondary institutions must be created. This means some form of temporary but special mass educational process. Indian initiative, channelled through our own organizations, must develop such institutions to enable our people to benefit from programmes now offered by existing educational systems.

These new institutions must be prepared to help Indians develop their sense of identity. The function of such institutions will lie in the areas of social rebuilding, psychological renewal and cultural renaissance. Indian

organizations must operate these schools, for only they qualify for the task of identifying teachers and administrators with the resources to meet the cultural needs of Indians.

The white person must come to realize that the Indian cannot be a good Canadian unless he is first a responsible and a good Indian. Few Indians can discover a sense of purpose and direction from the white society. They must find such a sense of identity within themselves as human beings and as Indians before they can begin to work creatively with others. The government must understand this, because it is in this area that Canadian society can form a successful partnership with the Indian, in working together to find ways and means through which the educational process will develop human beings with purpose and direction.

The Indian communities themselves carry the responsibility for solving the social problems faced by Indians. Social development is irrevocably intertwined with leadership development, educational progress and economic advance. To tackle these problems the Indian communities will need extensive resources, both human and economic. The federal government's proposal to transfer all services to provincial governments does not solve anything. This changes nothing; it leaves the Indian in the same bogged-down bureaucratic predicament. Attempts to solve his social problems will still be initiated by people from the outside who know little and understand less of the Indian. It is true that the provincial governments can play a useful role in providing support services to Indian communities, but first there must be created, within the communities, structures that attack the problems at their source. Ideally, most of the services within a community should be provided by the community itself. Before this can happen, huge sums of money must be provided, aimed at community problems. No outside bureaucracy, whether in Ottawa or in a provincial capital, is flexible enough either to meet the problems head-on, or better yet, attack the causes. Before the local communities can take over such responsibility, skilled, highly trained leadership at the local level must be found. Once again, that premises educational institutions geared to the needs of the Indian and controlled by the Indian.

Service and support structures in the social field—recreation, welfare, special education programmes, community development and law and order—must be set up in every community. Creation of a provincial Indian police force, trained and equipped to handle problems in any

community, should be supervised by provincial organizations. It seems reasonable to think that once an environment of self-reliance and independence exists, activities in which non-Indians can participate will develop naturally. From that foundation could grow cooperative ventures, both social and economic, which could help bring the races together, eliminating or dissipating to a large degree much existing bigotry. Racial cooperation is a two-way street. So far only the Indian has been expected to come the extra mile.

The Indian peoples of Canada are just beginning to be aware of the broad implications of economic development. Any progress to be made must be bolstered by basic sound economic programmes. For the first time the Indian peoples are beginning to realize that this means more than isolated, make-do farming, fishing, trapping or lumbering. Huge sums of money are needed to enable Indian groups to take advantage of economic development opportunities on our own reserves.

An economic development corporation, funded by both national and provincial levels of government, should be founded in each province. Qualified Indians must have control of such fund resources to enable them to finance the necessary programmes at the community level. Such development corporation funds would initiate research into the economic potential of every reserve, then get the necessary development programmes underway.

To handle properly matters like these, Indians must have the resources to hire the best brains in the country as consultants. Voluntary workers are not trained for such work. Indians will gain from the psychological advantage of knowing that such hired consultants are their employees, that they do not come as civil servants who in the process enslave the Indian. The Indian Association of Alberta, in preparing its policy paper in answer to the federal government's white paper, will go into detail in this area. For the purpose of this book it is sufficient to say that the subservient role of the Indian is fast drawing to a close.

I have dealt briefly with four areas in which I believe, given the opportunity, the Indian can more than fulfill his responsibilities to our country. There exists a belief among our people that we were given this country to share with all peoples and to ensure that its natural resources are used for the good of mankind. There exists also among the older generation of our people the feeling that the ancestors of the white people who came to our country came as human beings who were able to accept the Indians as human beings. Our elders believe that the process

of time and a changing world has caused the descendants of those first white people to grow less sensitive toward the Indian and, for that matter, less sensitive toward any human being. Our older people think that it is part of the responsibility of the Indian to help the white man regain this lost sense of humanity. I believe that the Indian people are not afraid of responsibility; in fact, they welcome the chance to play a new role in contemporary times. This can happen only if the rights of the Indian people are honoured, their dignity respected.

I have outlined some of what must happen if the Indian is to realize his potential and take part in today's world. We have seen what frustration, deprivation and misery can lead to in the United States and throughout the world. The young generation that is even now flexing its muscles does not have the patience that older leaders have shown. If the present leadership is unable to come to terms with the non-Indian society, unable to win respect for Indian rights and dignity, then the younger generation will have no reason to believe that the existing democratic political system has much meaning for them. They will not believe that the present system can work to change our situation. They will organize and organize well. But, driven by frustration and hostility, they will organize not to create a better society but to destroy your society, which they feel is destroying our people. This is the choice before the Indian; this is the fork in the road that the government and non-Indian society must recognize.

Controlling our choice of a path—the realization of the full potential of the Indian people, or despair, hostility and destruction—is our belief that the Indian must be an Indian. He cannot realize his potential as a brown white man. Only by being an Indian, by being simply what he is, can he ever be at peace with himself or open to others.

The present course of the federal government drives the Indian daily closer and closer to the second alternative ... despair, hostility, destruction.