

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



**Résolution des questions des pensionnats indiens
Canada
Manchettes**

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September 25, 2006

Look Inward, Pope

The Ottawa Citizen

By: Mike Reynolds

Re: What the Pope really said, Sept 20.

I agree completely with columnist David Warren's comment "the Pope was right to condemn the use of violence and intimidation to convert people."

Since the Pope is intent on spreading peace, some words about the history of his own church might be a good place to start. Perhaps first acknowledging the crusades, the Inquisition, witch hunts, residential schools, and sexual abuse of children could serve to make his message clearer, rather than the appearance of pitching stones from the porch of his glass house.

September 24, 2006

Summer of Our Discontent: Canada's Policy of 'White Guilt, Aboriginal Anger' a Dismal Failure

The Economist (also in *The Sunday Herald*)

CANADA'S much vaunted reputation for tolerance took a beating this summer in Caledonia, a town 80 kilometres southwest of Toronto, where a new housing development on land claimed by the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy has sparked a series of ugly clashes between the aboriginals and the town's non-indigenous residents.

The land is part of a much larger tract given by the British to their Indian allies from New York in 1784 when members of the tribes fled to Canada after the American war of independence. Claiming that the land was thereafter sold without their proper consent, members of the Six Nations have been occupying the site for the past six months, setting up barricades and blocking traffic. This, in its turn, has provoked a series of counter-blockades, brawls, vandalism, and a fight with golf balls and stones.

In a belated attempt to avert further violence, the provincial government bought the contested property from the private developers in June and opened negotiations with the Six Nations. But tensions in the town spiked again at the end of last month when the protesters threatened to complete the 11 unfinished homes themselves and to live in them throughout the winter.

Because Caledonia is on the doorstep of Canada's largest city, the conflict has been attracting blanket media coverage. But few have bothered to trace its origins back to their source: the spectacular failure of overall aboriginal policy.

Treating their one million indigenous citizens fairly should be the "ultimate moral issue for Canadians," says Paul Martin, the former Liberal prime minister. Instead, they are treated with a mixture of ignorance and indifference. The current policy, based on "white guilt and aboriginal anger," does not work, argues John Richards of Simon Fraser University.

Paul Chartrand, a Metis member of a former royal commission on the aboriginals, says that Canadian governments are not interested in long-term solutions, seeking rather to "stamp out fires." Martin largely agrees: "This is a file that has been shoved under the rug for 150 years."

Meanwhile, disputes over land are frequent and often violent, the result of resurgent aboriginal nationalism and an awareness that the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

Since 1990 some of the fiercest confrontations have been over an oil development near Lubicon Lake, Alta., a golf course expansion at Oka, Que., a provincial park in Ipperwash, Ont., a ski resort at Sun Peaks, B.C., and military flights over Labrador.

Each has followed a depressingly similar course. Ownership is disputed. An aboriginal claim is filed and the federal claims-processing machinery grinds into motion. Years, often decades, go by without resolution. The fuse is lit when the contested activity is at last allowed to proceed, despite the outstanding claim. No matter which side eventually wins, the other regards it as an illegal occupation.

Not all the news is grim. On the land-claims front, there have been a number of cases where aboriginal insistence that their rights be recognized before industrial development proceeds has led to agreements on job creation, revenue-sharing, training and land ownership.

This was the case with the Cree over the massive James Bay hydroelectric dams in northern Quebec, the Innu over the Voisey's Bay nickel mine in Labrador, the Inuit over diamond mines in the Northwest Territories, and the 1999 creation of the new territory of Nunavut, the largest land-claim settlement in Canadian history.

Now aboriginal groups along the path of the proposed Mackenzie Valley natural gas pipeline in the Northwest Territories stand to become part-owners of the \$7-billion project - if it goes ahead.

"Large-scale resource development has been the catalyst for just about every major land-claim settlement across the country," notes David Natcher, professor of aboriginal studies at Memorial University in Newfoundland. The bigger the development, the better the chance at settlement, he says, because the companies put pressure on governments to reach a deal.

But smaller disputes, like the one in Caledonia, are much harder to solve. The present confrontation is happening a full decade after a royal commission presented the federal government with a supposedly clear road map on how to repair its deteriorating relations with the aboriginals.

Set up by the Conservatives following the 1990 Oka conflict, the commission reported to a Liberal government in 1996. But the Liberals largely ignored its recommendations, including the suggestion that land claims be settled by a tribunal composed of both aboriginal and non-aboriginal members, rather than by the courts.

It is not too late for the new government to dust off that report. But even if all the aboriginals' claims are settled - and that seems unlikely given a backlog of more than 780 claims before the federal government - it would still not solve the aboriginals' plight.

Some analysts argue for much more to be done for the two-thirds of aboriginals living within Canadian society. That might tempt more Indians to leave the wretchedness of the reserves. But this would require the two levels of government to stop buck-passing and get their act together. Although the federal government is supposedly responsible for the aboriginals' overall welfare, the provinces have jurisdiction over land and resources.

Is the new Conservative government ready to change decades of failed policies? Early signs are mixed. As a one-time member of a federal claims commission, Jim Prentice, the new minister of Indian and northern affairs, has wide experience of aboriginal affairs. He has already pledged to slash the backlog of claims and to do more for the off-reserve aboriginals.

The government has also agreed to honour the promise of \$2.2 billion by the previous government to compensate the victims of abuse in aboriginal residential schools. But other moves seem less promising: Prentice has declined to intervene in Caledonia, refused to support a UN declaration on indigenous rights and reneged on the last government's pledge of an extra \$5 billion Canadian dollars for social schemes. 'This is a file that has been shoved under the rug for 150 years.'

ILLUS: Michael Laughing throws bread and cheese back at people who angrily left it for natives at the blockade near Caledonia, Ont., on May 22. Simmering tensions between aboriginal demonstrators and frustrated town residents came to blows after a contentious blockade was taken down, then reconstructed hours later. (SHERYL NADLER / CP file); Michael Laughing throws bread and cheese back at people who angrily left it for natives at the blockade near Caledonia, Ont., on May 22. Simmering tensions between aboriginal demonstrators and frustrated town residents came to blows after a contentious blockade was taken down, then reconstructed hours later. (SHERYL NADLER / CP file)

September 23, 2006

Quewezance Running for Fourth Vice-Chief

The StarPhoenix

Former Keeseekoose First Nation chief Ted Quewezance announced Friday he is joining in the race to become the fourth vice-chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN).

Quewezance's career in politics includes a stint as chief, tribal representative for Yorkton and chief of staff at the FSIN for 10 years.

"For many months now, I have had the pleasure of listening to Saskatchewan First Nations people tell me what they care about most," said Quewezance in a news release. "Our people say they need representative who will address the issues that really matter to them, improving our health-care system, strengthening our schools, creating greater economic opportunity and, finally, protecting our inherent treaty rights." He said his mandate would be to protect and enhance First Nations' treaty rights and get the FSIN back on track.

He is working on the residential school agreement and said if elected, he would work toward reconciliation for survivors of residential schools.

The election is set for Oct. 25 at TCU Place.

Lawyers Did a Vital Job

The Leader-Post (Regina)

Without years of work by lawyers, thousands of residential school survivors might still be waiting for compensation.

On the surface, comparing a \$10,000 individual residential school settlement to a \$40-million pay cheque for a local law firm seems disproportionate.

After all, residential school survivors endured tremendous hardships and many were scarred for life by the sexual and physical abuse they suffered during their time at residential schools. It is understandable, as some have said this week during a Court of Queen's Bench hearing on the documentation of legal fees, that the money that will soon be going to lawyers should instead be given to the survivors.

But there is much more to this story than a simple dollars-and-cents comparison of who is getting how much.

That a chunk of the \$2-billion settlement will soon go to law firms -- including an estimated \$40 million to the Merchant Law Group -- and not directly to the 78,000 documented survivors can be traced back to decades of foot-dragging by the federal government. If residential school abuse cases had been recognized and dealt with 10 or 20 or even 30 years ago, lawyers might never have become such a major part of the settlement equation.

But that did not happen and, without the determined efforts of a relatively small number of lawyers, including the Merchant Law Group and a second, Toronto-based consortium, it is quite possible there would be no settlements -- period.

Not only did these firms demonstrate considerable initiative in taking on such difficult cases, given how reluctant the federal government has been in dealing with the issue, they did so at great financial risk.

Lawyers usually make a living by having their clients pay them immediately for their services. That has not happened with the almost 8,000 individuals represented by the Merchant Law Group. The firm has yet to receive any money, despite working for a decade on these cases. During that time, it has committed the talents of about 40 lawyers to first finding residential school survivors, then documenting their cases, and, finally, convincing the federal government that they should receive equitable compensation.

Perhaps, instead of resenting the fact that lawyers will be paid in accordance with industry standards for their services, there should be recognition that the compensation

cheques to victims were made possible because of some good work by the legal profession.

Alberta Pressed to Improve Aboriginal Education

The Edmonton Journal

By: Paula Simons

Thomas Erasmus knows what it takes to be a winner.

The Edmonton business consultant is a former member of the Canadian national baseball team, former coach of the Canadian junior baseball team and the 1985 winner of the Tom Longboat Award as the Canadian Native Athlete of the Year.

A member of the Goodfish Lake First Nation, near Lac La Biche, Erasmus, 50, is also one of the rare members of his generation of aboriginal Albertans who completed high school.

"It was a struggle," he grins.

"My mother and father really pushed me."

Both his parents had somehow managed to evade being sent to native residential school. "Because they didn't bear the scars of that experience, they could be a support to all our family."

For their son, that meant the chance to go to school, the chance to compete as an elite national athlete, the chance to launch a successful career.

Three years ago, Erasmus was named to Alberta's blue-ribbon learning commission. It was a logical outgrowth of his time as the chairman of the board of Portage College in Lac La Biche and his seven years working for the Lac La Biche School Division, setting up a program to train native liaison workers.

The commission had a long list of recommendations of ways for the province to improve the quality of education for aboriginal students across Alberta.

But three years later, Erasmus is far from satisfied. The province has made some progress, he acknowledges -- but not nearly enough.

Are a greater percentage of aboriginal kids finishing high school? Are more children in the primary grades passing their provincial achievement tests?

Erasmus says there's no evidence anything the province has done has made any difference to classroom performance or graduation rates.

Now, Erasmus has marshalled an impressive lineup, including Sam Shaw, the president of NAIT; Eric Newell, former Syncrude CEO and the chancellor of the University of Alberta;

Pat Mackenzie, learning commission chair; Chris Shade, former chief of the Blood Nation; and Audrey Poitras, president of the Metis Nation of Alberta. On Friday, their high-powered coalition held a press conference to demand the province do more to improve aboriginal education -- starting with appointing an aboriginal advisory committee to work directly with the education minister and deputy minister.

Granted, an advisory council does not sound like a very radical idea. What we need is action, not more talk. But anything that puts moral pressure on the Tory government is a start.

What percentage of Alberta's aboriginal kids graduate from high school?

I don't know. Nor does anyone else.

Alberta Education says no one in the department is tracking those numbers. What data they have about the academic achievement of First Nations and Metis students is confidential, not for public release.

The last data I saw said only eight per cent of Indian, Metis and Inuit Albertans graduate from high school. But that number's at least five years out of date. Have things gotten better since then? Worse? Who knows? We're groping in the dark, hosting endless conferences and roundtables, while first graders struggle to read and teenagers drop out.

On Friday, Education Minister Gene Zwozdesky declined to make any public response to Erasmus's proposal. But he needs to heed its message.

The province has acted on some commission recommendations. It now gives school boards an additional \$1,040 for every aboriginal pupil. It has spent almost \$300,000 to develop new Cree and Blackfoot curricula, and established additional university spaces for aboriginal education students. It's also building two new schools on a Metis settlements near High Prairie.

Yet the government has rejected other vital proposals. The commission recommended the province fund junior kindergarten programs and all-day senior kindergarten. Those suggestions weren't targeted at aboriginal kids. Still, if the province funded junior kindergarten and all-day senior kindergarten programs at high-needs schools, First Nations and Metis students would be the biggest beneficiaries.

Instead, Alberta cut funding for junior kindergarten and all-day kindergarten programs -- a backwards, embarrassing decision for a province with an embarrassment of riches.

Granted, solutions won't be easy. The schools on Alberta's reserves are the poorest of all, with the fewest resources and the lowest graduation rates. But band schools are the

responsibility of the federal government. Ottawa, the province, the First Nations, and regional school boards will have to work together to bring real change.

Unless we get this generation of aboriginal kids literate, until we get them through high school, we will never be able to defeat the social and economic woes that bedevil both our rural reserves and our urban native neighbourhoods. Without education, First Nations and Metis children will never claim their rightful place as citizens of Alberta and full participants in our economy. Educating aboriginal students would alleviate our skilled worker shortage, lower health-care and welfare costs, reduce crime. It would make Alberta a richer, safer, fairer, happier place. What smarter investment could we make?

Priest Guilty of Sexual Abuse May be Mentally Unfit to Face Sentencing

National Post (also CanWest News Service)

The sentencing hearing for a retired Catholic priest, who has confessed to sexually abusing 47 girls, came to an abrupt halt yesterday because the guilty party may be mentally unfit to face criminal proceedings. The judge hearing the case ordered a psychiatric assessment to determine if Charles Henry Sylvestre, 84, is fit to stand trial after this lawyer made the surprise revelation. If the court-appointed psychiatrist finds Sylvestre unfit, he would likely walk free and the criminal case would grind to a halt. Sylvestre pleaded guilty in August to charges of indecent assault for sexually abusing 47 girls in southwestern Ontario parishes from 1952-86. Court was adjourned after defence lawyer Andrew Bradie applied for an assessment to determine if Sylvestre was unfit to stand trial. Mr. Bradie hired a psychiatrist who found Sylvestre doesn't have the mental capacity to understand the criminal charges and what is happening in court