

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



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

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Canadian Press (8 Feb 07) "Protest held outside office of Regina lawyer representing school victims"

REGINA (CP) -- A small group of people have staged a protest outside the office of a high-profile Regina lawyer.

Lawyer Tony Merchant represents about 10,000 aboriginal victims of abuse in residential schools.

Some of those victims say they want Merchant to open up his books so that they can get their cheques.

The federal government has said it won't pay the victims until it has a full accounting of Merchant's legal fees.

Protest spokesman Grant Severight says it's the victims' money, and they should be able to know how much Merchant has been paid.

The Merchant Law Group fired back with a written statement saying it has provided extensive access to its files already.

The firm says the federal government is simply dragging its feet to pay the settlement.

The Hour with George Stroumboulopoulos (8 Feb 07) "Interview with Phil Fontaine"**TRANSCRIPT**

Media Outlet:	CBC-NW (National)	Date:	Feb 8/2007
Program:	The Hour with George Stroumboulopoulos	Time:	20:00
Anchor / Reporter:	George Stroumboulopoulos	Length:	10:00
Topic:	Interview with Phil Fontaine		

George Stroumboulopoulos: Time to move to our first guest to the program right now. I'm happy to have him here, Phil Fontaine, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

(applause)

This week this man spoke out again about aboriginal poverty in this country. Here is what he said: Phil Fontaine said we rank no better than a third world country and that is simply unacceptable. There is no good reason why our people should be as poor as they are.

Dirty drinking water, poor housing, overcrowding, drug addiction, suicide, unemployment, the list is a long one but did you know half of the aboriginal population in this country is 23 years old or younger? Think of that, half, 23 or younger and it's growing faster than any other. So now Phil Fontaine has a big challenge but also a new idea to make poverty history for First Nations and the federal government is not a part of it and he joins us.

How are you? Nice to see you.

Phil Fontaine (National Chief, Assembly of First Nations): Nice to see you again.

George Stroumboulopoulos: This program that you're putting together is interesting because it's almost like you're essentially bypassing the government, you're going to corporations and it's almost like corporate entrepreneurship or corporate mentorship for jobs in some way. Why this approach?

Phil Fontaine: Well, it's never been tried before. At least in the scale that we are planning, and because it's pretty obvious to us that it's not good enough to go to government.

George Stroumboulopoulos: Um-hmm.

Phil Fontaine: We're going to have to reach out to the community that has the expertise, the capital and the desire to effect the kind of change that is needed in Canada because we have a huge problem in Canada and that's First Nations poverty. This is an onerous burden, not just on First Nations people but the country. And so we're calling on the business community, corporate Canada to join with us.

George Stroumboulopoulos: What are you asking them for?

Phil Fontaine: Well, it's really four main areas. Procurement, partnerships, investments and jobs. And jobs is an important consideration because Canada, because of its aging population, the aging workforce, has a very big, big problem in ensuring that there is enough workers. And CD Howe Institute identified two primary sources to meet future demand. Immigrants and our community and the business community at least those that have already expressed a very strong desire to work with us, understand that the huge potential with this very young population, 60 per cent under the age of 24.

George Stroumboulopoulos: Um-hum.

Phil Fontaine: And that shouldn't be seen as a burden, it should be seen as an opportunity and so what we're talking about here is about creating opportunity and through creating opportunity, bringing about the kinds of changes that our community and the country needs.

George Stroumboulopoulos: When you take a look at this plan here, and we hear that several very big corporations are interested. Because we have also seen governments promise and promise and promise and do nothing. So I wondered if are there benchmarks in place where corporations have to meet certain goals so that it's not just lip service in order to get the press but they actually have to do something?

Phil Fontaine: Well we will actually, as part of this corporate challenge, establish a corporate table where we will convene on an annual basis a meeting of all of the corporate partners to come together and assess the work in progress, to determine together whether the corporate challenge is working and ...

George Stroumboulopoulos: The one you mentioned was jobs. And I can imagine that certainly on an immediate level, that's a very important one. What kind of jobs are we talking about?

Phil Fontaine: We're talking about every sector in the country. For example, in Fort McMurray area, the tar sands, Syncrude has been working with the First Nations community there for the last 20 years and they did something that's entirely, completely different. They choose to invest in our community, they knew there was a risk but it's paid off significantly because now, industry there employs about 1,500 aboriginal

people and the industry there has done in the order of \$1 billion worth of business with Indian owned and managed companies. Significant.

George Stroumboulopoulos: Wow! You know, with so many challenges that face a lot of the young people in your community, has there been challenges in engaging them to want to partake in this sort of plan?

Phil Fontaine: Well, poverty is unhealthy. It doesn't do anything about instilling confidence and trust and that the system actually works to the benefit of all and our people, especially our young people, too often despair that there is no way out, that there is no hope. And but there is hope, and there is a way out. And of course, one of the central pieces here is education.

George Stroumboulopoulos: I was wondering if there's a certain part of it where you just kind of have to take a look at this plan that's in place and to a lot of the young people that there is no real connection. In some of the communities there are success stories, like you mentioned. And a lot of people who I have talked to from your community have talked that a lot of it just boils down to the relative value of the chief on the reserve and that certain chiefs are more I guess plugged into how to move the community forward, and there are other ones who it's just never going to get better while they are in charge.

Is that a challenge?

Phil Fontaine: Well, it is a challenge. It's true that there are some very significant success stories and there are tremendous success stories. The success is a real contributor to Canada's prosperity and these people that have demonstrated success, of course, have their people behind them. It's an easier sell to our community but this is something that has to take place on a much broader scale and what we're suggesting through this initiative with corporate Canada is that we build on success.

And unfortunately, success doesn't sell to the general public. We get greater attention when we talk about problems and poverty is Canada's biggest problem.

George Stroumboulopoulos: But do you need the public to care or do you just need it to work? Because the rest of Canada sort of demonstrated that they're not really paying attention.

Phil Fontaine: It has to work and we have so many cases where it's worked to a tremendous advantage for the community I represent and for the public.

George Stroumboulopoulos: You've done this for a while. You have got a couple of years left on this term. I wondered for you, and I know that you have a very political job in some sense, you have a very human, social job in one hand but a very political job and we've talked a couple of times and I wondered how frustrating it's got to be at a certain stage for you that you have to come up with this plan here when the government isn't really playing along. Are there just things you wish you could say but you just can't say?

Phil Fontaine: Well, I'm very aware of the political sensitivities. The Assembly of First Nations, the organization I head is not an opposition party.

George Stroumboulopoulos: Um-hmm.

Phil Fontaine: It's a legitimate political voice for First Nations and we represent First Nations governments and so it's very important for us to conduct ourselves as governments ought to conduct themselves and that's with respect and recognizing the legitimate interests that are represented by other governments.

George Stroumboulopoulos: You know, Canada saw Kacheshewan play out on television and now there's at least 100 communities that have this very similar problem with unclean drinking water in this country and how many times can you say it, Phil, without you sometimes just wanting to grab a table and throw it and say wake up! We have a problem here. And as the government of Canada, it's your responsibility to fix this?

Phil Fontaine: It is frustrating and I can't say this enough. The biggest social justice issue that Canada faces is First Nations poverty. This is an onerous burden on our people, it causes despair, a sense of hopelessness and enough is enough. We want to turn this thing around. We want to make our community a real contributor to Canada's prosperity and it's clear to us that the corporate community must be one of the important vehicles in bringing about positive change.

George Stroumboulopoulos: How much do generations play in this and has the generation swings where it is the much younger group of people who will soon be in charge? I wonder if, because some of these wounds run so deep, if maybe there needs to be just a clean change for everybody to kind of move forward in a way that the environment is now an issue because a lot of the younger people grew up with the environment as an issue? And I'm wondering if the same thing has to happen here?

Phil Fontaine: Well, it's obvious to us that structural reform is necessary. Structural reform that will give hope in our young people, that will instill pride in our young people, will say to them that it's possible to

expect a better life and really to dream big dreams and one of the ways of ensuring that we do that is to focus on success.

George Stroumboulopoulos: Yes.

Phil Fontaine: To talk about all of those incredible achievements and accomplishments. For example, the fact that in 1952, we had at best 50 people in post secondary institutions, universities. Today, we have close to 30,000.

George Stroumboulopoulos: That's amazing.

Phil Fontaine: It's a tremendous success story and Canadians should be aware of that.

George Stroumboulopoulos: That's not just about hoping for a better future, but it should be also about demanding one. Nice to see you, Phil. Thank you very much.

Phil Fontaine, everybody.

(applause)

Phil Fontaine: Thank you.