



Quebec youth bill has shades of residential-school attitude
Permanently removing children from reserves could be a disaster

Freelance

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(This article was signed by most of Quebec's 43 First Nations' chiefs.)

The Quebec government's changes to the Youth Protection Act are the most serious threat to Quebec's aboriginal children since the sad residential-schools scandal.

The purpose of the residential schools was to make First Nations disappear as quickly as possible by "killing the Indian in the child," or ethnocide. The new measures in the youth-protection law would have the same effect and be just as disastrous for Quebec's First Nations.

The new clause in the Youth Protection Act ensures that, as of today - July 9, 2008 - a child under age 2, who has been placed for a year outside of his or her family, can now be placed outside his or her Indian community until the age of majority.

These First Nations children would be taken away from their natural families, communities and roots permanently, if a First Nations foster home or institution could not be found in the community. But because of a lack of government funding and commitment, such services as group homes are virtually non-existent in the First Nations communities. This situation has been denounced countless times, and yet nothing has been done.

In a brief on the rule changes in Bill 125, the Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse du Québec expressed concern about the application of these rules in aboriginal communities, the projected time limits for the placements and the lack of available placement resources on reserves.

In a previous report in 2003, the CDPDJ expressed similar concerns regarding the protection services for Algonquin children and the infringement of their right to receive adequate and continuous social services.

Moreover, a few weeks ago, the federal auditor-general also denounced the underfunding of support services for First Nations families and children.

We are unable to meet the demands of the current act because we do not have access to appropriate services. While Quebec allocated \$15 million for these services in its 2008-2009 budget, this money is not available to all Indian communities.

Once again, our children's and parents' rights to receive adequate and continuous social services are being infringed.

For more than a year, we tried in vain to get the Quebec government to decree a moratorium on these permanent placements of First Nations' children. A demand for an investigation has even been

submitted to the Commission des droits de la personne du Québec.

Jean Charest's government refuses to agree to a moratorium on the permanent-placement provisions. From our perspective, this refusal constitutes a very serious injustice that brings back memories of the residential-school horrors for which Prime Minister Stephen Harper recently apologized.

Government assimilation policies and negligence toward our communities have led to disastrous results that translate into a disproportionate number of First Nations child placements in the Quebec system - the rate is eight times higher than for other Quebecers. Experiences over the past decades have clearly demonstrated that removing First Nations children from their environment is not a solution.

We are not arguing against the necessity for efficient ways to protect children who, in many cases, must be removed from their immediate families for substantial periods of time. But we are firmly opposed to the ordering of permanent placements of aboriginal children in non-aboriginal homes for the sole reason that there are not enough resources to keep them on reserves. It is imperative that we be able to take care of our own children.

Is the continued suppression and extinguishment of our people acceptable to Quebec society?

We denounce this situation in hopes that Quebec society and its institutions, which value their uniqueness, language and culture, will join us in fighting a policy which is so detrimental toward our people.

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