

CONCLUSION

Land. Labour. Capital.

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David Newhouse

We have land. We have plenty of labour. We have capital, both financial and intellectual and we know how to get more. We have a strong desire to create better lives for ourselves. We have a developing institutional infrastructure and capacity, capable of encouraging and supporting the development of our communities in many areas: economy, health, education, social welfare, culture. The decade since the release of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has seen an explosion in the number of small businesses started by Aboriginal peoples. The organizations we created are starting to effect change within our communities: employment rates are up slightly in some areas, household incomes are slowly moving away from being primarily government transfer payments; high school retention and graduation rates have improved. Progress is slow and many still live in poverty and on the margins of society. Many live in substandard houses; Many don't have good access to clean drinking water or reliable sources of energy to heat and light their homes. The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is still problematic on many fronts. There is still much work to be done to improve the material quality of life in this country for many of us.

It is easy to focus on the problems. They are real. They affect the lives of many every day. They can be overwhelming. It is the work of each and every one of us to work to solve them; to create the partnerships that are necessary and to effect social change that allow for greater life choices. The recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal people form a solid basis for moving forward. In moving forward, we must not ignore some of the very real changes that have occurred over the last three decade, some stimulated by the work of the Royal Commission.

We, in conjunction with the courts, have shifted the self government debate from being about the right to govern to being about how to govern. The philosophical debate about the right to self government was over with the adoption of the Penner Report in 1985. After its adoption, it was not a question of whether or not we as Aboriginal people had a right to govern themselves but in what form and with what powers. We are now debating details, a debate that will last forever if Canadian experience is any indication. We have been engaged in a debate about powers and jurisdictions, lands and resources over the last 25 years,

a debate that is about regaining control over our lives and lands. And for the most part, we are winning the debate for greater control.

The legacy of the last 25 years is this: We have regained confidence in ourselves. We again believe that we can do things for ourselves and that we can affect our future. In the economic development arena, we argued for a comprehensive approach to development, we argued for self-determination, we argued for Aboriginal capital corporations, increased loan funds, equity contributions and loan funds, among other things. And in part the government listened and started to respond. Our voices were heard and listened to. We have effected change of a fundamental kind. We are creating the foundation for a modern aboriginal society. One that is confident, aggressive, assertive, insistent, and desirous of creating a new society out of Aboriginal and western ideas.

The next twenty years is a critical time for Aboriginal individuals and communities. During this period, much of basic structures and processes of Aboriginal life will be modified and placed under aboriginal influence: Aboriginal governance will become a social and political reality. A confident, aggressive, savvy, educated experienced leadership has emerged over the past two decades who know how to push hard and get what they want. Behind them are thousands of young students who are in post-secondary education institutions across the country and who over the next decade will move into positions of leadership in many communities. These people are determined, well-educated, courageous and want the world to different for them and their children.

These youth see increased Aboriginal self-government as within their grasp: they will have experienced aspects of it: in education, in health care, in economic development, in social work, in housing, in cultural programs, in language training and education. It is this desire to experience more that is the fundamental change. It leads to a new aboriginality.

This aboriginality is defined by what I call: post-colonial Indian consciousness. Post-colonial Indian consciousness is a fundamental condition of modern aboriginal society. It is a society that is aware that it has been colonized in many ways; a society that is aware of the implications of its colonization and which is choosing deliberately, consciously and systematically to deal with that colonization. It is a society that is coming to terms with what has happened to it. Post colonial Indian consciousness will be the defining force within aboriginal society over the next generation. No where is this more evident than in the economic sphere.

One of the most difficult challenges we face will be fostering the development of positive public attitudes towards us, our institutions and our governments. RCAP recommended that there be major public education effort aimed at helping Canadian citizens to understand aboriginal aspirations, cultures, communities and ways of living. This is an area that is still sadly neglected.

Now that we have land, labour and capital, perhaps some will listen more closely. I hope that the next issue devoted to the state of the aboriginal economy will have a very different set of results of report.