

Menno Boldt, *Surviving as Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.

review by Jack Smith

Boldt critically evaluates Canadian and Indian perspectives concerning the future of Indians in Canada. The author proposes to engage the reader "to envision alternative and better worlds for Indians" (p. xiv). Better worlds are needed because it had been Boldt's experience that, by all accounts, Indians in Canada experience a tragic existence. Motivated by this fact and the lack of current practices and policies to remedy the tragedy, the author offers a social platform on which to develop solutions other than those presently pursued by Canadians and Indians. The author is

for whatever will make life better (and against what doesn't for the mass of Indians who live in conditions of degrading dependence, destitution, and powerlessness; who are psychologically defeated; and who feel spurned and abandoned even by their own leadership. [pp. xvi, xvii]

Boldt cites this platform as "a moral commitment to justice for Indians" (p. xvi), which would ensure the cultural and social well being of Indians.

The first of the book's five chapters provides a justice paradigm that has the potential to reverse the effects of a history of Canadian injustice to Indian people. Against this backdrop, the remaining chapters critically evaluate Canada's Indian policy, Indian leadership and politics, the future of Indian cultures, and present designs for Indian economic development. Together the chapters' conclusions establish five imperatives necessary to "promote the survival and well being of Indians as Indians" (p. 265). These include

moral justice for Indians; Canadian policies that treat Indian rights, interests, aspirations, and needs co-equally to the "national interest"; Indian leadership that is committed to Indian government "of, by, and for" the people; revitalized Indian cultures, languages, social systems that are adapted and developed within the framework of traditional philosophies and principles; and economic self sufficiency and independence achieved through employment in the Canadian mainstream. [p. 265]

In support of these conclusions the author suggests that moral justice for

Indians will not be achieved through recognition of Aboriginal rights in a Canadian Constitution that continues to support colonial legal views; rather, recognition of Indian rights as embodied in the spirit and intent of the treaties ought to be pursued through international charters that guarantee peoples' rights. The author also suggests that Canada's current Indian policies, shaped as they are by the national interest, seek to eliminate special status for Indians and provide a framework of institutional assimilation. Thus the pursuit of moral justice for Indians calls for a move away from the paramountcy of the "national interest" over Indian interests. National policy should reflect Canada's role as trustee for Indians and should therefore consider Indian interests as being co-equal with the national interest.

Moral justice also means that Indian leaders must discard the principles and structures of Canadian political institutions and "relearn how to govern themselves according to Indian traditional philosophies and principles" (p. 266). Boldt suggests that this would afford the Indian leaders control that would be responsive to Indian people rather than to the Canadian government. Leaders therefore must envision a culturally-based nationhood founded on revitalized traditional values adapted to today's social and political environment.

The final chapter on economic issues maintains that economic self-sufficiency will be required to achieve a moral justice for Indians and Indian independence. The pursuit of traditional economies, on-reserve economic development and government grants can only perpetuate a "culture of dependence." Moral justice calls for the pursuit of sustainable economic development, obtained by having Indians participate in the Canadian economy. In the author's model, productively employed reserve and off-reserve Indians become portable economic zones whose revenues become sources of taxation. This tax base would then provide the foundation for sustainable economic self-sufficiency.

*Surviving as Indians* is a welcome addition to the literature concerning the future of Indians in Canada. The book does offer an alternative to the stated perspectives of Indians and Canadians alike. While the reality of Canada's injustice to Indians is often acknowledged, seldom has an author so critically questioned the approaches of both government and Indian leadership to correcting injustice. In the chapter on leadership, Boldt raises issues of Indian leadership seldom publicly expressed. For instance, he suggests that Indian leaders often constitute a ruling class elite and that classism has emerged from the imposed colonial political and administrative structures. Elitism and classism counter traditional structures of communalism and the attendant empowerment of the people. The author suggests that leaders should focus on

empowering the people rather than maintaining power among the ruling elite. Such suggestions are provocative.

Reserve and off-reserve Indians will also take exception to such suggestions as the taxation/participation model of sustainable economic development. Full participation in the Canadian economy and the taxation of Indians are abhorrent to those who discourse on self-government. The model is an appealing conjecture, but as presented here it ignores many associated issues. Do all Indians wish to contribute to an Indian government in which they have no participatory rights, as is currently the case for off-reserve Indians? Can this situation be remedied to the satisfaction of all concerned to make the model feasible? Are there jobs in an arguably racist Canadian economy for Indian people? Boldt provides no answers to fundamental questions like these and leaves the reader to speculate on the detail.

This points to another shortcoming of *Surviving as Indians*. Detail could be provided through the use of existing examples of Indian communities that have taken control and prospered under their own philosophies and initiatives. Surely these exist. Examples that illustrate the applicability of Boldt's ideas would add credibility to his arguments. Examples would also assist the reader in understanding the substance of the suggestions and to visualize the outcome of the author's proposals. Providing examples would further the author's goal of reaching "the broadest readership possible" (p. xx). As it stands, even with comprehensive appendices, the book requires careful reading. Issues arising from Canadian-Indian relations, past and present, are conceptually difficult at the best of times and some questions may remain unanswered.

Still, to the audience to which it does speak, *Surviving as Indians* reaches its intended objective. It will spark debate on several fronts, including whether a justice paradigm is too idyllic, whether Indians and Indian leaders can revitalize and adapt traditional philosophies, and whether Canadians and their leaders will acknowledge Indian rights inherent in the spirit and intent of the treaties. At the very least, Menno Boldt has effectively questioned the adequacy of present Canadian and Indian perspectives on the future of Indians.