

# **URBAN ABORIGINALS AND SELF- GOVERNMENT**

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In my previous lives in politics in Saskatchewan and for a time as a member of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, I had to consider the circumstances of Aboriginal people in urban centres in Saskatchewan and elsewhere. There are at least two broad classes of issues. The first class of issues are the issues that arise when Indian First Nations have a reserve in or near an urban centre. When one thinks of this situation across Canada, one thinks of Sydney, Nova Scotia; Montreal; Vancouver, and now Prince Albert and Saskatoon, to name a few. The second class of issues are those that arise when individual Aboriginal people, not bands but individuals, live in urban centres rather than in predominantly Aboriginal communities.

I want to say just a word or two about that second class of issue. If we are to talk about achieving Aboriginal self-government, and if we are cognizant of the fact that more than 50 percent of Aboriginal people in Canada live in urban centres and not Aboriginal communities, and if we're talking about systems to deliver services, including justice systems, then we have to think about different models for achieving some measure of Aboriginal self-government in urban centres. It seems to me, and it has occurred to a great number of other people as well, that one way to move toward Aboriginal self-government for urban dwellers would be to provide Aboriginal people with an opportunity to control institutions that deliver services to them.

Some people are puzzled by this idea. I suggest to them that we are, as a mainstream society, very familiar with it. In the field of schools we have Roman Catholics, self-selected, organizing and running their own schools—self-government to that limited extent. We have a similar situation with Francophones in Saskatchewan. Francophones, self-selected, will be operating their own schools. There seems no reason why Aboriginal people or groups of Aboriginal people could not do the same thing with schools or child welfare systems or services for seniors and so on. I think one of our objectives is to see how we can move forward with the idea of Aboriginal self-government in urban centres and what we can decide about who should do what next.