
**ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE
ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA**

BY

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AND

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I wish to thank you for the privilege you have accorded to me, and to the Indian Brotherhood of the N.W.T., in inviting me to address you. I want as well to take this opportunity to thank you very warmly for the gracious assistance you have given us, both moral and financial. The Indian people of the Mackenzie District or Dene as we call ourselves, are involved in a long and difficult struggle against powerful forces. We need all the help we can get and it is good to know that you are our friends.

I know that you are to have at this Synod an important discussion on native affairs and northern development. I shall do my best to contribute to that discussion tonight. I wish that I could stay with you longer, but Territorial Council is in session at the moment, and I must return to Yellowknife tomorrow to resume my duties as a Counsellor.

My task of speaking to a southern audience is made easier because of the increasing interest in the North that has resulted from recent activities. In 1973, in the caveat case, Justice William Morrow of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories ruled that we Indian people have a right to claim the land; as of today, the appeal of the Crown against that decision began in Yellowknife before the Court of Appeal. A decision is expected in the fall, and then a possible appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The Inquiry into the proposed Mackenzie Valley Gas Pipeline under Justice Thomas Berger of the Supreme Court of British Columbia is now in full swing. As well as the continuation of the formal hearings in Yellowknife, a number of Indian communities in the Mackenzie Valley will be visited over the next couple of months. The Berger Inquiry has meant an unprecedented opportunity for my people to present their views, not only on the proposed pipeline, but on our land claim and on the future society we would like to have.

Our land claim grows out of an evolving and dynamic situation, and it is clear to me, as a leader of my people, that I do not fully express their needs and aspirations by presenting their claim as if it is only a property right. For when the Dene say "we own the land" they are making a fundamental statement about their identity as a people and about their rights as a people.

For me to be compatible with what my people are saying, I must go beyond property rights and talk of human rights. I must go beyond talking of our rights as owners of the land and talk of our rights as a people to self-determination. I must go beyond talking of Indian people as a minority within a European system and talk frankly of colonialism.

Now we are all aware of colonialism when we see it

outside of Canada. We know that in the last three decades there has been an awakening of colonized people around the world and that today there is a Third World that is struggling for self-determination and throwing off the yoke of colonialism.

But just as there is a Third World of poor and oppressed people, so there is within many countries, including Canada, native minorities that are oppressed and colonized. They constitute what George Manuel of the National Indian Brotherhood calls the Fourth World, the world of internal colonialism. We too want, and are prepared to struggle for, self-determination and recognition as a distinct people.

I know it may be difficult for some Canadians to admit of this internal colonialism, so let me take a moment to spell out some of the ways in which it manifests itself.

It consists, in the first place of years of effort by the dominant society to destroy our language, our culture and our institutions. Other men's truths are taught to our children. Our way of life is said to be irrelevant to the modern world. The wisdom of our old people is ignored. In short, our essence as Indian people is degraded and we are made to feel the inferiority of the colonized.

Or consider the mundane matter of oil and gas, and the proposed pipeline. When we Indian people try to protect our rights we are told by the companies and government that we must not stand in the way of projects that will benefit all Canadians. Well, let us assume for the moment that the gas is really needed for the south, and that is a very big assumption given the way in which the companies manipulate figures. Let us further assume that the companies, and a government which listens to them very carefully, is really able to define the public interest, and that is another very big assumption. What would still be true is that the rights of Indian people would be being pushed aside for what is at best the convenience and minor comforts of an affluent society. That is surely colonialism of a very real nature no matter what rhetoric is used.

Some people are now willing to admit that Indian land was stolen in the past but they have difficulty seeing that it is still going on. Father Rene Fumuleau's book **As Long as This Land Shall Last** shows very clearly that the treaties which were signed with us historically, with some fraud on the part of the government, were motivated by a very particular conception of the public interest. Treaty 8 was offered to us in 1899 in response to the discovery of gold in the Yukon in 1896. Treaty 11 was offered to us in 1921 in response to the discovery of oil near Fort Norman in 1920.

The object of the Treaties was to extinguish aboriginal title and open the way for exploitation of the land. In return for \$5 each and the promise of reserves the government claims we gave up our land. We Indians know that we never agreed to extinguish title. The treaties were not land cession Treaties but peace and friendship Treaties. The Indian version of the Treaties was found by Justice Morrow to have sufficient substance to justify the filing of the caveat.

Now in 1975 the government wants a land settlement with us, a kind of modern version of the Treaty with more than \$5 for each Indian but still with the same object of getting our land. This time it is in response to the discovery of oil and gas at Prudhoe Bay in Alaska in 1969.

Nothing has really changed and the colonialism of the past persists as the colonialism of today.

Another clear manifestation of colonialism is when a distinct people have alien institutions imposed upon them. Yet that is exactly what has happened to the native people of the North as Canada has unilaterally extended her sovereignty over us. A clear example is the present Territorial Council with its sergeant-at-arms and points-of-order and first, second and third readings and so on. Indian and Inuit councillors from the settlements may be initially confused, but they soon become frustrated and angry. For what does it mean to have a native majority on the Council - a matter of which the Government of Canada now boasts - when the institution itself is utterly foreign to the native mode of thought and action?

But this colonialism in the political institutions of the North is even more obvious. For the Territorial Council really doesn't have any power anyway. The government probably figures it's not much of a risk to let natives run a puppet government. What the North is about to the developers, and the Canadian government, is its non-renewable resources, and control over these remains securely vested in Ottawa.

For someone like myself, who is a native councillor, this means exposing the illegitimacy of the N.W.T. Government in many areas where it now pretends to have authority over native people, and putting forth demands that are consistent with what we want after a land settlement.

Even that is not the end of the story about the nature of colonialism. When we look at the Third World, we quickly

see that real power still often lies with big companies, and they often engage in very exploitative practices toward people who are poor and oppressed. It is therefore of some interest to discover that the very companies who sometimes engage in very reprehensible practices abroad are also operating in the Canadian North. And that the Government of Canada which helps these companies in their foreign operations also helps them in their operations in the Canadian North, notwithstanding objections from concerned citizens, such as the churches.

Let me give you a couple of examples. The first is Falconbridge Nickel, a company with large Canadian operations, though it is ultimately controlled by Superior Oil in Texas. In the Mackenzie District, Falconbridge owns a Giant Yellowknife Mines which has become infamous for producing arsenic as well as gold with predictable bad effects on the native people and the workers. As well, Falconbridge's sister company, Canadian Superior Oil, is a member of the Arctic Gas consortium that wants to build the gas pipeline.

When it comes to the Third World, Falconbridge has a record that I know many of you in this audience know of and strenuously object to. It operates in the Dominican Republic, the Union of South Africa, Southwest Africa and Rhodesia. I suppose a company that practices that kind of racism abroad doesn't find it too burdensome to its conscience to put a little arsenic into the drinking water of the Indian people of the Yellowknife band.

My second example is Brascan. Though it's a Canadian company, its biggest operations have been, and still are, in Brazil. They presently include a big ranching operation on Indian land. And neither Brascan, nor the Canadian Government, seems to have gotten at all upset about dealing with a country which has been known to practice literal genocide against Indians.

That bothers the Indians in the North, not only because we have a feeling of solidarity with aboriginal people throughout the world, but because Brascan has recently begun to operate in a bigger way within Canada and in the process is penetrating the North. Already Brascan owns minority interests in the Hudson Bay Company, in Elf Oil which has oil and gas rights in the Western Arctic, and in Magnorth Petroleum which holds a 14 million offshore acres in the Arctic Islands.

I think that I have demonstrated pretty clearly that colonialism is alive and well in the North. There are, in fact, two Norths. On the one hand, there is the North as the last frontier of the big developers for whom the name of the game is resource exploitation, and to whom we Indian people are a nuisance and a relic from the past. On the other hand, there is the north that is the homeland of the original people, now struggling to assert our right to self-determination and resolved to build a world in which we can flourish indefinitely. Are we not entitled to ask: which side are you on?

As we move to assert our rights, we are increasingly asked, just as oppressed people elsewhere in the world have been asked: what do you want?

To begin with I am sure that if the Dene were given a choice we would choose to be left alone, and to be allowed to relate to the rest of the world on our terms. We are a separate and distinct people, who were made Canadians by decree and not by free choice, and our first choice would understandably be to be a sovereign people.

But we are few in number and have some understanding of power, so our present range of choice must be tempered by realism. It is our fate to be part of this country, but we live in the last part of Canada where native people are still in the majority and what we want is maximum self-determination within the context of that unique situation. We want the Northwest Territories to be seen not as the last frontier of the whiteman, but as that part of Canada where native people can be given the opportunity to create their own institutions, including political institutions. When all is said and done, that is what we mean when we say we own the land and that we want a just and equitable settlement of our land claim.

We Indian people are constantly told that we must change, that we must not resist progress. But it sometimes seems to we Dene that it is the white man who resists change, and insists on going on in the same old way plundering resources with little regard for the air, the water, the land and the animals and ultimately, the rights and welfare of people. I hope I am not too presumptuous, at least to this audience, if I suggest that it is the white man who must change and who must cease to resist the progress being made in the movements of oppressed people in many parts of the world. We should all remember that in liberating others, man liberates himself.

That is all I have to say, but I will try to answer your questions.

The North has also been in the news because of the arsenic poisoning from the gold mines in the Yellowknife area. We would obviously sooner not be in the news for reasons like that, but such events should at least enable all of us to see reality very clearly. That reality is that big companies come into the North to take gold from under Indian land, and what Indian people get in return is air that is unsafe to breathe and water that is unsafe to drink. The companies make a lot of money and the government sits on its hands, suppresses reports and tell lies. These are strong words, but how else am I to describe a situation where two cabinet ministers publicly take credit for free water delivery to all members of the Yellowknife band so they will not have to drink polluted water when, in fact, no such free delivery has been established in spite of repeated demands to do so. Could there be a clearer case of why Indian people are saying that developments cannot take place on their land until they are subject to effective control by Indian people?

The central issue for we Indian people is our land claim, and I want to take this opportunity to discuss with you some aspects of it which we think are novel and exciting. We are saying that we have occupied and used from time immemorial some 450,000 square miles of land, and that therefore we own this land and are entitled to decide, as owners, what use should be made of that land. We are saying that when developments do take place, and many already have, we are entitled as owners of the land to receive revenues, or royalties. These royalties could then be used to fund community enterprises and thereby create a viable and long-term economic base under Indian control.

This view of our claim is certainly valid, but it creates certain ambiguities and is, in fact, too narrow a view. Words like "land" and "ownership" have different meanings to different people, and I have in mind in particular the different meanings they have to native people and non-native people. Within European society, land means property, or real estate. It is a commodity with a price that can be bought and sold. But to Indian people, land is the essence of our way of life, of our very being and existence. It is not something alien to ourselves but something we must live in harmony with.

These different conceptions of land matter greatly, because they lead to very different actions. When Indian people say they own the land, the response of the government, representing the powerful developers is to say: even if you do, that simply means we will pay you money to buy away your aboriginal title and that is, in fact, what happened in both Alaska and James Bay. They find it difficult to understand us when we say: to sell your land would be like selling your soul, and if you force us to do that, you are engaged in cultural genocide.

The problem that we Indian people have is that these two different conceptions meet, and clash, in a highly unequal way, for one is the language of the dominant society and the other the language of a small and beleaguered minority. Because we are the weaker party, we have been forced to attempt to deal with that dilemma by translating our demands into your way of thinking. So we say: recognize our aboriginal title, and give us title to the land within your European system of property.

But that does not really resolve the dilemma, for the price we have paid to think in the white man's terms and use his language is that we risk giving up our own way of thinking and doing.

And let there be no mistake about it: European people, their institutions, and their system are radically different from Indian people and their institutions and system. The differences are such that just as an Indian is confused and mystified by the European system, so few Europeans have any real understanding of the Indian system. European people talk of private property and competition. Indian people talk of community and sharing. European people talk of investments which will pay off in five or ten years and have little regard for long-run consequences. Indian people think of their children and their grandchildren. These examples only scratch the surface of differences that run deeply.

I do not mean, of course, that all white people think that way, but there is little doubt that the most powerful do. Nor do all Indian people still relate fully to our traditional way of thought, but that is only to say that our values are already being eroded by those of the dominant society.

But what is striking is that the Indian system has survived in spite of decades of blatant attempts to destroy it. And something that is coming out very clearly in the community hearings before Justice Berger is that Indian people, both young and old, are not just saying "stop development" in a negative way. They are calling in a very positive way for the restoration of any cultural values and traditions which they have already lost.